Gwyn's pen; the evil god Melwas became Sir Melias, Meliot, Meliodas, Maelgwyn and Meleaus, and finally Meleagant, Meliagaunt or Meliagrans – a wicked prince who abducted Queen Guinevere. The god Brân the Blessed, mythically situated in the Welsh region of Gower (the Carmarthen Bay area), is the progenitor of Brian, Breunis, Breunor, Bran of Gore, Brandegoris, Brandel and Brandiles.

In addition to the gods, mortals also feature in the legend. Uriens, King of Rheged, appears in the myth under his own name, but he also has alter egos as King Rience, Sir Rayons and King of Nentres. The father of Guinevere (Gwenhwyfar), known in Welsh legends as Orgyrvran, plays his part as Leodegrans, but is also multiplied into Colgrevauns, Clarivaus and Gouvernail.

Fantasy literature attempts (with varying degrees of success) to make sense of this confusion. Terence H. White's**The Once and Future King** sticks firmly (albeit in a postmodern and satirical manner) to Malory's version; the same can be said of Guy Gavriel Kay's (*The Fionavar Tapestry*). Similarly – though with a distinct nod towards Celtic culture – Marion Zimmer Bradley proceeds in **The Mists of Avalon**. Stephen R. Lawhead (the *Pendragon* series), on the other hand, draws on the original Welsh text and the versions by William of Malmesbury and Geoffrey of Monmouth – his work, for example, does not feature the character of Lancelot. Gillian Bradshaw takes a similar approach in her trilogy **Hawk of May**, **Kingdom of Summer** and **In Winter's Shadow**.

We shall briefly discuss the ideas of other writers under the relevant entries.

Arthur

> *...the noble Arthur, whose noble deeds I intend to record in this present book here following.*
>
> Sir Thomas Malory, preface to the original edition *of *Le Morte Darthur**

We already know everything there is to know about this character, so we shall confine ourselves to just two matters – his genealogy and his name.

It seems entirely reasonable to believe that King Arthur is, in origin, the god Gwydion, and that he came into being through a transformation of a deity into a hero, a process characteristic of Celtic mythology. This view is also most clearly represented by Marion Zimmer Bradley in **The Mists of Avalon** – in this book, Gwydion is the king's real name.

In Welsh legends (the Welsh were fond of lineages and family trees), Arthur is a descendant of the legendary Custennin (Constantine) Gorneu. Custennin had many sons, including Uther (later Pendragon) and Meirchyawn. Meirchyawn was the father of King Mark of Cornwall (the one associated with Isolde), whilst Uther… well, we know whose father he was. However, the Welsh Arthur had siblings: a brother, Madog, and a sister, Gwyar.

Since we've mentioned Uther – 'Pendragon' is a title, the name of an office, not part of a name. *'Pen'* means 'mountain' in Welsh, hence Pendragon (Welsh: Pendaran) is the supreme military commander, *the* Roman *Dux Bellorum*. Similarly, the Irish word for 'mountain' (*ard*) was used to designate the kings of Tara with the title Ard Rhi. And if one were to accept the spelling 'Bendragon' as correct, an irresistible association arises with the god Brân, whose severed head is called Uther Ben.

But let us return to Arthur. There have been attempts to trace his name back to the Welsh Gwyrthur. A fairly plausible theory suggests that the king's name derives from the Welsh word *arth* and *the* Gaulish *artos*, both meaning 'bear' (Ursus). The monk and chronicler Gildas, in his **De excidio et conquestu Britanniae**, does not use the name Arthur, but mentions (in an unfavourable light) a certain 'bear', a ruler who – despite initial successes – brought about the titular downfall of Britain.

Attempts have also been made to derive the king's name from *the* Latin **cataphractus** (heavily armoured) – **arctarius** – **artorius**, etc., but this seems like a shot in the dark. Someone has also pointed out that the Celts in Gaul worshipped a god called Mercurius Arctaius. That, too, seems like a connection worth celebrating.

Meanwhile, the joker Jack Vance (the *Lyonesse* series) placed Arthur's ancestors amongst the kings invented by

the Elder Islands, known as Hybras (the mythical Hy Brasil). According to Vance, Uter Pendragon was a descendant of Olam Magnus, King of Lyonesse. Well done, Jack.

And to conclude, a relatively little-known curiosity from the life of King Arthur. It comes from *Le Morte...* Malory. You see, Arthur, that righteous knight and noble king, ought to feature in nativity plays alongside King Herod. For, just like Herod, he carried out a massacre of the innocents. Knowing from Merlin's prophecy that he would meet his death at the hands of a child born on the feast day of Beltaine, Arthur ordered, under threat of death, that all children born on that day be handed over to him. He commanded that the infants be loaded onto a ship and cast out to the mercy of the elements. A multitude of innocent children perished – but Mordred, who was among them, survived by a miracle – and Merlin's prophecy was fulfilled. On the battlefield at Camlann.

Guy Gavriel Kay alludes to the gruesome episode from Arthur's life described above in his **The Fionavar Tapestry**, a *fantasy* trilogy closely linked to Arthurian legend and Celtic mythology. And the child of the prophecy and the massacre of the innocents have found their way into numerous *fantasy* works – one need only recall Ron Howard's film **Willow **.

Excalibur

As is widely known, this was the name of Arthur's magical sword, bestowed upon him – as a symbol of power – by the Lady of the Lake. The very act of bestowing the sword is deeply symbolic and has its roots in Celtic beliefs – we shall return to this matter under the entry: 'Lady of the Lake'. For now, let us focus on Excalibur itself.

In *the Mabinogion* and other Welsh legends, Arthur possesses a sword called Caledwvlch – a name which the translator *of the Mabinogion*, Lady Charlotte Guest, renders as 'The Shatterer'. Other translators prefer the name 'Steel-Cutter'. The blade of the sword was adorned with two golden serpents (dragons?), and when the king drew it from its scabbard, it seemed, to quote: 'the serpents breathed living flame from their mouths, and that flame dazzled the eyes of all'. In addition to the sword, the king possesses

He also provided other weapons: the Rhongomynaid spear, the Carnwenan dagger and the Wynebgwrthucher shield. Father Laya-mon calls this utterly unpronounceable shield: Pridwen. In Welsh tradition, however, the name 'Prithwen' is borne not by a shield but by Arthur's flagship – for the king waged war not only on land but also at sea.

As well as weapons, the Welsh Arthur possesses several magical artefacts (including cauldrons!), as well as a cloak of invisibility.

As I have already mentioned, Geoffrey of Monmouth transformed 'Caledwvlch' into 'Caliburn', from which *the Vulgate*, and subsequently Malory, derived the name Excalibur. *The Vulgate* claims that this name means 'Cutter of Steel' in Hebrew, and is therefore close in meaning to the Welsh term. The name Excalibur can also be derived from the Latin phrase *ex calce liberare* – to free from the rock, to draw from the stone. A neat name, but a meaningless one – after all, Excalibur was not the very same sword that Arthur drew from the boulder!

The scabbard in which the king carried Excalibur was also a gift from the Lady of the Lake and was likewise enchanted – it protected Arthur from all wounds. This scabbard – and the sword – were stolen by the sorceress and traitor Morgana, who gave them to her lover and accomplice, Acolon, son of Uriens. Armed with Excalibur and the scabbard, Acolon was set to kill Arthur with ease. During the fight, the king managed to reclaim his weapon and defeat the assassin. Morgana, however, drowned the scabbard in the Lake – Arthur never recovered it. This is a clear analogy to the Welsh myth of Blodeuwedd, the woman of flowers, who stole the secret of life from Lleu Llaw Gyffes so that her lover could strike him a fatal blow. Goronwy, Blodeuwedd's lover, is – like Akkolon – killed, whilst the traitoress – like Morgana – flees. The difference is that Blodeuwedd is captured and punished. Morgana is not.

Excalibur, as is well known, returns to the Lady of the Lake in the legend's finale – before Arthur sails off to Avalon, he orders the sword to be thrown into the water. In English folk tradition, this took place near Glastonbury in the county of Somerset, at a place called Pomparles Bridge.

Merlin

...the most famous man of all those times,
Merlin, who knew the range of all their arts,
Had built the King his havens, ships and halls,
Was also Bard, and knew the starry heavens;
The people called him wizard.

Tennyson

For Merlin had in magic more insight
Than any living creature before or since.

Spenser

There is a hilarious, almost anecdotal story associated with this most popular form of the famous wizard's name, one of the most important figures in the legend. Merlin was created by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who combined several quasi-historical and legendary bardic figures, known in Welsh folklore as Myrddin. However, writing for a Franko-Norman audience, Geoffrey wished to avoid unnecessary associations with the obscene word *'merde'* (shit), so he romanised the Welsh 'Myrddin' into the Latin 'Merlinus'.

Undoubtedly, however, the wizard Merlin – the indirect instigator of Arthur's birth, his guardian, mentor and adviser – is a compilation of four mythical figures. One is the rather mysterious god Math, son of Mathonwy, uncle, teacher and helper of the wise Gwydion, father of Lleu Llaw Gyffes. The second is Gwydion himself, the druid of the gods. The third is Myrddin Emrys, a semi-divine figure known from the triads and bardic songs—a poet, magician, healer and prophet, sometimes referred to as Ambrosius. The fourth is Taliesin, a druid-bard who probably did indeed exist and was active in the 6th century (although this figure, too, has become so steeped in legend that any talk of historical authenticity borders on exaggeration).

Among Merlin's greatest feats in myth are the relocation of the Stonehenge stone circle from Ireland to Britain, prophesying the coming of Arthur and playing an active part in that event, helping him claim the throne (the sword in the stone), and consolidating the young king's power after—

by building for him (using magic, of course) the 'ports, ships and courts' mentioned by Tennyson, and – as befits a druid – providing assistance (*auxilium et consilium*) in organising the government and knighthood of the Round Table. Help, advice and a mentor's warning, which Arthur – a Celtic king – could not ignore. And when he did ignore it (Guinevere!), the result was disastrous...

Some later ecclesiastical versions (Robert de Boron) could not forgive Merlin for dabbling in black magic and branded him a heretic, the son of the devil and a virgin (even a nun). Perhaps this is why the druid's fate is ultimately a sad one – he faces a severe 'punishment for his sins'. For despite all his wisdom, in the end Merlin behaved like a child. He fell under the love spell of a charming sorceress named Nimue and allowed himself to be outwitted to such an extent that he revealed all his magical secrets and mysteries to her and allowed himself to be imprisoned in a magical crystal grotto (according to another version – inside an oak tree). This is, of course, a clear reworking of the Welsh myth – an analogy to the imprisonment of Gwydion by the evil god Pryderi ap Pwyll (in later versions: Arthur by Pwyll himself).

The wizard Merlin features in most literary works devoted to King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Among the most important and revealing accounts of this character are: Robert de Boron's **Merlin** (c. 1190), **The History of Merlin**, one of the five books of *the Vulgate* Cycle (c. 1225), Thomas Malory's **Le Morte Darthur** (1485), as well as the much later (1889) **The Idylls of the King** by Alfred Tennyson. Merlin appears (or is mentioned) in the works of Ariosto, Cervantes, Goethe, Uhland and Sigrid Undset, amongst others.

Naturally, no self-respecting Arthurian *fantasy* could fail to include Merlin. In **The Mists of Avalon**, Marion Zimmer Bradley even introduces several of them, making 'Merlin' – in accordance with certain historical theories – a druidic title or office, and Nimue the younger sister of Galahad, daughter of Lancelot and Elaine. Terence H. White has Merlin living his life in reverse – the wizard is still young-

It's getting light (which is probably why he behaves like a bit of a arsehole with Nimue). Stephen R. Lawhead makes Merlin the son of Taliesin and a princess of Lyonesse, a descendant of the Atlanteans, whilst Mary Stewart, in her book **The Crystal Cave**, identifies him as the illegitimate son of Ambrosius Aurelianus, Vortigern's successor. In C. S. Lewis's **That Hideous Strength**, Merlin rises from the grave to take part once more in the struggle between the forces of Light and Darkness...

The English writer Robert Nye (author *of the* famous **Falstaff**) made Merlin the title character of his book. Nye's **Merlin** is an incredibly interesting read. Intelligent, brimming with sophisticated erudition, postmodern and obscene to the point of being utterly delightful. I highly recommend it.

Roger Zelazny, on the other hand, has great fun with the myth in the second *Amber* cycle. In Zelazny's work, the name Merlin is borne by the son of Corwin of Amber, the grandson of King Oberon (ruler of the elves in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Merlin's mother – and for a long time his sole carer – is Dara from the 'diabolical' Chaos. Although the legend of the son of a nun and the devil seems to be turned on its head here, it comes as no surprise that a boy of such origins becomes a wizard. As early as the first volume, the mischievous Zelazny locks his Merlin away in a classic crystal grotto... And although the author goes to great lengths to complicate the plot, the attentive reader immediately knows who is behind it all: the classic figure, a woman with no magical knowledge, whom Merlin trusted because he loved her. The classic Nimue…

In Lord Tennyson's **Idylls of the King*,* the seductive sorceress who brings about Merlin's downfall is not Nimue, but Vivien, the Lady of the Lake. The Vulgate offers the same version – Merlin is seduced by the very same Lady of the Lake who raised Lancelot.

To this day, Merlin's grave is shown to unsuspecting tourists in Brittany, in the famous forest of Brocéliande, in the so-called Valley of the Fairies, not far from Quintin.

The Round Table

When King Leodegrans of Kameliard learnt of Arthur's plans to marry his daughter, Gi-

newry, he announced that, along with the girl's hand, he would present Arthur with the Round Table, kept in Kameliard, as a dowry—a piece of furniture once crafted by Merlin using magical powers for Uther Pendragon. And so it came to pass. Along with the table, which was set up in Camelot immediately after the wedding, Leodegrans gave Arthur a far more practical gift – a retinue of one hundred knights.

Merlin cast a spell so that magical letters would appear on every chair at the Table, spelling out the name of the knight who was to sit there. One seat, however, remained unmarked.

'King Arthur,' said the wizard, 'ensure that the table is filled. For it will seat one hundred and fifty valiant and noble men, who shall be known as the Knights of the Round Table. One seat, however, must not be occupied by anyone, for it is the Perilous Seat, *Siege Perilous*, upon which the Chosen One, the most worthy of the worthy, shall one day sit. And this shall come to pass on a day of great significance, when the Great Purpose is revealed."

This, of course, refers to Galahad and the appearance of the Grail.

As we already know, the first person to place this piece of furniture—so important to the legend—in the throne room of Camelot was the monk Wace, author *of *Brutus**. The table at which Arthur sat with his knights was round, having neither a head of the table nor a foot of the table, which was meant to symbolise equality and brotherhood.

Later adapters of the myth sought to further develop the ideology of the Table. Firstly, it had its own tradition – it was the third Round Table in succession, continuing the ideas of the previous two. The first of these two was, in fact, the table of the Last Supper, at which Christ sat with his apostles. The second was the Table of the Grail – for the successor to Joseph of Arimathea, Bron, who looked after the Grail in Britain, also sat with his companions at the Round Table, at the centre of which the miraculous Chalice was placed. It was at this very table that Bron was granted the title of King of the Rich Fisherman, a title later borne by all subsequent Custodians and Guardians of the Grail. For, according to legend, Bron fed

satiating all those dining at the table with a single tiny fish, which he miraculously multiplied. Of course, Christ is also a Fisherman, as are the apostles, whom Jesus calls with the words: 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Mark 1:17).

Symbolism and deeper meaning were also attributed to the Perilous Seat, that *'Siege Perilous'*, which was to remain empty until the arrival of the Chosen One. It represented the seat occupied by Judas at the Last Supper. When Galahad arrived at Camelot and took his seat at the Siege Perilous, he thereby symbolically atoned for Judas's guilt and reunited Jesus's table, which had been shattered by betrayal.

In Plantagenet England, as I have already mentioned, attempts were made to exploit the legend of Arthur for political ends. The Plantagenets aggressively claimed the right of succession from the legendary king and emphasised their Arthurian – or rather pseudo-Arthurian – lineage and its attributes at every turn. It is from those times that the custom, popular at many European courts, of placing round tables in throne rooms originated, at which the monarch and his vassals would play the roles of Arthur and his knights. The Round Table of Winchester, crafted around the year 1300 – that is, during the reign of Edward I – was presumably used for such games. Only the tabletop has survived, measuring eighteen feet in diameter and divided into seats for the king and twenty-four guests. King Arthur's authentic Round Table, if it were to seat one hundred and fifty knights, would have had to be considerably larger. Based on the theoretical – and modest – assumption of one metre of table per knight, this would amount to approximately fifty metres in diameter. That is no small matter – not to mention the technical capabilities of the craftsmen of the time and the problems of fitting such a colossus into any hall; it is worth noting that a knight would barely be able to see the fellow diner *sitting opposite him*, and if he wished to communicate with him, he would have to bellow like a bull.

Some versions are based on the assumption that there were several Round Tables in Camelot. The most important was, of course, the one at which Arthur himself sat, and the absolute elite—

twelve knights. It was, therefore, a classic table of Jesus and the apostles.

Other kings

At the time of Uther Pendragon's death, as legend and *fantasy* literature teach us, several kings (clan leaders) laid claim to the role *of Dux Bellorum*. Several of them undoubtedly have their legendary-historical prototypes, for their names recur in numerous versions.

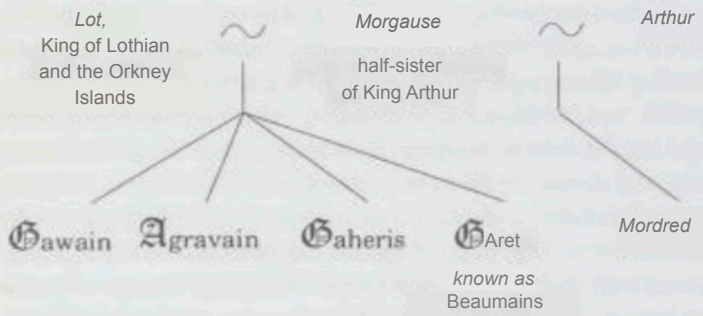
One was King Lot, ruler of Lothian and the Orkney Islands, related to Arthur through his marriage to Morgause, daughter of Igerne and the king's half-sister. Despite this kinship, Lot was in active and armed opposition to Arthur and was killed in one of the battles fought by the king against the rebels, struck down by the sword of King Pellinor. *The Vulgate* and **The Mists of Avalon** give a different account: Lot was killed in battle against the Saxons whilst defending the country from an invasion. All his sons were prominent knights of the Round Table. I list them in the genealogical tree of the Orkney dynasty.

The name Lot (as well as the name of his kingdom, Lothian, which survives to this day) undoubtedly derives from the mythical Ludd, the legendary founder of London. Ludd, in turn, is simply a distorted version of the god Nudd Silver-Handed from the Welsh pantheon.

King Pellinor, Lot's slayer, is known as the ruler of Listinoise or the King*of the Isles*. It is unclear which islands are meant, as there is no shortage of them off the British coast. Pellinor was the father of so many figures important to the legend that I have also drawn up a family tree for him, intended to clarify the situation. Pellinor was slain by Gawain, Lot's son, in a vendetta for his father's death. This vendetta, as we shall see later, had further consequences.

The King of Cameliard (?) was Leodegrans (known in Welsh as Orgyrvran). He, as is well known, was the father of Gwenhwyfar (Guinevere), Arthur's wife. Marion Zimmer Bradley, who clearly has no great fondness for Guinevere, suggests that the marriage was based on more economic considerations,

The Orkney Connection



rather than romantic – Leodegrans, you see, had a large stud farm, and Arthur urgently needed mounts for his knights. Moreover, as we already know, it was Leodegrans who gave Arthur the Round Table as part of her dowry. So it was not love, but business.

King Uriens, ruler of Rheged, or Cymru (present-day Lancashire and Cumbria), features in the oldest Welsh legends. He was one of the chieftains who initially refused to recognise Arthur and fought against him. According to many sources, Uriens rallied the Ancient Tribes around him – those Britons who had submitted neither to the Romans nor to Christianisation. Eventually, Arthur formed an alliance with Uriens by marrying his half-sister, Morgana, to him. Uriens was already advanced in years by then, and had grown-up

of his sons – Akkolon and Uwain. Morgan had an affair with Akkolon and, together with him, plotted against Arthur. Arthur killed Akkolon in a duel and took offence at the rest of the family.

Uriens's cousin, the ruler of Gore (Gower, i.e. Swansea), was King Bagdemagus.

Uriens (much like Orgyrvran-Leodegrans and Ban of Benwick, discussed below) is identified in the earliest versions of the legend with the god Brán the Blessed, son of Llyr, the god of the seas.

King Pellam, the Rich Fisherman, ruled the Land of Lakes (presumably Yr Widdfa, or Snowdonia, which abounds in mountain lakes). He was a direct descendant of Joseph of Arimathea and a custodian of the Grail. He suffered from an incurable wound inflicted upon him by Balin the Wild. It was Galahad, his great-grandson, who finally healed him. For Pellam's son was King Pelles, and Pelles's daughter was Elaine, later Lancelot's lover and Galahad's mother. King Pelles should not be confused with the knight Pelleas – in the myth, these are two different, unrelated figures. This does not prevent both from being descended from the mythological Pwyll, ruler of Annwvyn.

King Clarivaus ruled over Bernicia and Deira (Northumbria).

Cornwall, meanwhile, was ruled by King Mark, who resided at Tintagel, the ancestral castle of Gorlois and other lords of the region. Mark appears in Welsh legends as March ap Meirchyawn, and his wife is known as Essyllt Fynwen (White-Necked). In Malory's account, Mark's wife – and the lover of the knight Tristan of Lyonesse – is called Isolde the Fair (*La Beale Isoud*) and is the daughter of the King of Ireland, the niece of the knight Morholt.

On the continent, in Gaul, two brother-kings reigned – Ban of Benwick (Boulogne?) and Bors of Ganis (Wis-sant?). Both – as well as their descendants later on – were always loyal allies of Arthur, whilst Arthur, in turn, supported them both against King Claudas, their enemy. The offspring of Ban and Bors are of great significance to the legend (Lancelot!), which is why I have drawn up a family tree for both of these continental kings.

History is silent on Bane and Bors – during the Arthurian era (c. 500–550), the Frankish kingdom was ruled (in succession) by kings of the Merovingian dynasty – Childeric, Clovis and Clodomer.

In Lesser Britain, or Armorica (present-day Brittany), King Hoel (Howel) reigned. In Arthurian legend, Hoel was the father of Isolde of the White Hands (*Isoud la Blanche Mains*), whom Tristan married. The ruler of Armorica was always a loyal ally of Arthur – he supported him with his army in all twelve battles against the Saxons.

According to legend, a Celtic colony and enclave in Armorica was established following the conquest of the Breton Peninsula by the Welsh chieftain Conan. Whether this is a historical fact is unknown, but Brittany was undoubtedly Celtic. To this day, the Bretons and the Welsh can understand one another when they speak their own languages – both of which have survived in a largely unchanged form.

In many versions of the myth, a king of Ireland named Angwisans (Aguissance, also Anguish, Augustan or Augusel) also features. As the father of Isolde the Fair, he would have been King of Tara. Once again, this has little to do with history – in Arthurian times, Niall, Loegaire and Tuathal are considered the kings of Tara, followed by Diarmuid Mac Cearbhail. This last ruler of Ireland is identified with King Gurmun, known to us from the legend of Tristan and Isolde translated by Boy Żeleński. Occasionally, however, Angwisans is referred to as King of Scotland (Albania), which might suggest that he was not the ruler of Tara, but of Dal Riada, a land in south-west Scotland colonised by the Irish, encompassing part of present-day Strathclyde and the Inner Hebrides. The king's name might confirm this – it corresponds to that of the semi-legendary ruler of Dal Riada, Angus Mac Erc.

Ginewra

Leodogran, the King of Cameliard,
Had one fair daughter, and no other child,
And she was the fairest of all flesh on earth,
Guenevere, and in her lay his sole delight.

Tennyson

Whilst she lived, she was a true lover, and therefore she met a good end.

Sir Thomas Malory

In Welsh legends she appears as Gwenhwyfar (White Ghost), although Arthur had three (!) wives with the same name*. However, it was Gwenhwyfar, daughter of Orgyrvran, who entered the myth, initially as Wenhaver, Guanhamara, Gvenour or Ganhumara; later, in the French version, as Guenièvre or Guinevere; and in Malory's original spelling – Gwenyvere, daughter of King Leodegran.

Whilst Penelope, Odysseus's wife, entered literature (and even everyday speech) as a symbol of marital fidelity, Guinevere is renowned and remains to this day a symbol of something quite the opposite.

Her extramarital love affair with Lancelot, the central plotline here, likely has its roots in the actions of the pseudo-historical Ganhumara of Geoffrey of Monmouth, wife of the pseudo-historical Arthur, who succumbed to the traitor Medrawt. The figure of Guinevere, however, also has an undeniable mythological origin. After all, in *the Mabinogion* we find the infidelity and betrayal of Blodeuwedd, the flower-wife of Lleu. There is also the story of a certain Gwawl, who set his sights on Rhian-non, the wife of Pwyll. The precise, archetypal version of Guinevere's tale, however, can be found in the classical, heroic legends of Wales and Ireland. The Welsh legend tells of the romance between Essyllt Fynwen, wife of King March, and a knight—

* Please note both the number of Arthur's wives and the names they bear. Three Gwenhwyfars – three White Zja-wy. In other words, one: the Great, the White, the Triple. Guinevere from the earliest version of the Arthurian legend is none other than the Great Goddess.

, Arthur and Tristan ap Tyllwch – which later gave rise to the French (Breton) tale of Tristan, Isolde and King Mark.

There are several Irish versions – they even form a whole group of tales, known as *'aithed'* – that is, stories about the abduction of a woman. One of the better-known tales, and one that parallels the legend of the unfaithful Guinevere, is the story of the love between the beautiful Gráinne, wife of Finn Mac Cumhail, and Diarmuid O'Duibhne, Finn's nephew. Another tale recounts the elopement of Deirdre, the betrothed of King Conchobar, with Naois, the son of Usnach.

An even older tale – and likely the source for the Arthurian myth – is the Irish legend of the god Mider, who seduced and abducted the fair Étaín, wife of Eochaid Airema, High King of Ireland, from Tara, an event which sparked a brief conflict. It is worth noting that *'Eochaid'* means 'horse' in Irish. The Welsh name 'March' – the name of the king whose wife was seduced by Tristan – has the same meaning. An interesting coincidence!*

The motif of taking a king's wife is clearly rooted in the beliefs, customs and very nature of the Celts. During the wedding ceremony (and thereafter), the wife of a Celtic king symbolises the Earth over which the king reigns. Taking his wife is therefore an act that undermines not only the king's authority

* Both kings – Eochaid and March – were in fact duped by their wives' seducers, but that is not the point. The horse is symbolic. Some sources (Janet Cave and Margery du Mond, **Witches and Witchcraft**, and also Paul de Saint-Hilaire, **L'univers secret du labyrinthe**) state that the Celtic king had to take part in a fertility ritual to be understood quite literally, in which the ruler's lover was… a white mare. The king had to prove himself… as a stallion, mounting the Divine Mare (as we know, for instance from reading Graves, the white mare was an attribute and aspect of the Great Goddess). After the act, the mare was killed, quartered and boiled in a cauldron, and the king bathed in the broth – presumably cooled by then.

In 1399, upon ascending the throne, Henry IV of Lancaster established the Order of the Bath. The connection is clear – Henry wished to confirm that he was the rightful ruler of the Britons – having undergone an initiation by bathing – in the manner of the ancient kings of the Isle.

as a man (a cuckold, a cuckold!), but also calls into question his ability to rule. This motif found its way into the Arthurian myth directly from Celtic mythology – in the tale devised by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Medrawt (Mordred) lays claim to Arthur's throne, whilst at the same time taking his wife from him. We find this theme in yet another part of the legend: the wicked Prince Meleagant makes a play for Arthur's throne by abducting Guinevere whilst she is out on a May Day outing. Once again, Celtic symbolism – after all, this 'May Day outing' is not just a casual stroll through the woods or a picnic on the grass – it refers to the Beltane mystery ritual celebrated under the open sky, a festival of spring. Meleagant usurps power by perverting the symbolic Celtic mystery of the marriage to the abducted queen.

The structure of this type of love story in Celtic legends is always triadic (as in triads), based on a triangle: the old king–the queen–the young suitor. Two men compete for one woman. Finn–Gráinne–Diarmuid, Conchobar–Deirdre–Naoisi, Eochaid–Étaín–Mider, Pwyll–Rhiannon–Gwawl, Lleu–Blodeuwedd–Goronwy, Arthur–Guinevere–Lancelot, Mark–Iseult–Tristan. This arrangement clearly alludes to the cycle of nature – the seasons. The young hero symbolises summer, rebirth, the surge and blossoming of vital forces, which stand in contrast to the waning, winter-like power of the old king. And the ruler cannot be weak; he cannot be barren, cold or sexually impotent – for he is, after all, wedded to the Earth, the Great Mother, symbolised by the spring queen, who, during the Beltaine mystery, is to be loved – loved physically, erotically. Sexual impotence on the part of the Goddess's consort is unthinkable – it could lead to the Earth's barrenness and the devastation of the land. The Goddess would simply have to look elsewhere – or, as we mentioned earlier, a rival must emerge to challenge the old king. In most myths, this serves as a test for the old king – a trial, an examination of his royal power – from which the ruler emerges victorious, regaining his wife (Pwyll, Eochaid) or exacting royal vengeance upon her and her seducer (the legend of Blodeuwedd). Later

Later versions of the legends (as we know them today) are enriched with a romantic element – the queen loves the pretender and, as a rule, dies of this love when the young man (Diarmuid, Naoisi) is slain by the old king, who nevertheless still proves himself strong. Such a tragic ending, however, has a further, nostalgic consequence in the myths – the kingdom (such as King Conchobar's Ulster) must, as a result of this turn of events, face destruction. The legends unambiguously suggest that it would have been far better if the Old Man had been taken by the devil, and the Young Man had taken his place at the side of the Queen-Goddess. It is from these very versions that Guinevere and Isolde were born – and the attitude that the authors of subsequent versions of the myth have towards these characters. Both queens betray their husbands. It's very nasty… but somehow we like them all the same. And we make excuses for them… Well, Guinevere was not a faithful wife – but she was a faithful lover (*true lover*).

Why do we like Guinevere and Isolde? Is it not perhaps because both these characters resonate with Celtic echoes – echoes that are close to our hearts and dear to us, people of the emancipated twentieth century, for whom (not all of us, not all of us) male chauvinism and gender discrimination in every respect are abhorrent? For amongst the Celts, a woman – and especially a queen – was a full-fledged member of society and enjoyed the same privileges as a man. There could be no question of any discrimination. Just like a male king, a Celtic queen could, if she so wished, be promiscuous. If an unscrupulous king could take concubines to his bed without facing widespread condemnation, then no one could forbid a Celtic queen from having lovers, taken on a *one-night-stand* basis, and no one dared to condemn her for it. The queen personified the Great Goddess, and the deeds of goddesses are not to be questioned. The amorous preferences of the famous Boudicca were well known, whilst the erotic exploits of the no less famous Katrimandua, Queen of the Brigantes, became almost legendary. As for the mythical Medb, Queen of Connacht and wife of King Ailill, Irish folklore tells it plainly that she often and willingly bestowed upon handsome men 'the friendship of her thighs'.

Naturally, for the medieval adapters of the legend – both the champions *of amour courtois* and the authors of religious versions – such freedom on the part of a woman was unthinkable... and incomprehensible. That is why the extramarital affairs of Guinevere and Isolde became, in medieval versions, 'grave sins' – time bombs destined to lead to tragedy and destruction. And because – particularly with regard to gender equality and women's independence – the Middle Ages are still with us, the medieval form of the legend remains the classic one, and the women of the legend are defined accordingly: Guinevere and Isolde are 'unfaithful', Morgana is an 'evil witch', Nimue is an 'unscrupulous seductress'...

In Arthurian *fantasy* literature, Guinevere is always present. Marion Zimmer Bradley, as I mentioned, is not particularly fond of the queen; the portrayal in **The Mists of Avalon** is not the most sympathetic. In Robert Nye's**Merlin**, Guinevere is a nymphomaniac with a birdbrain, and to make matters worse, she stutters. A lovely and interesting portrait of the queen, however, is painted by Parke Godwin in his book ***The Beloved Exile***. The queen is portrayed as a wise woman, strong-willed and of strong character. As such, she is a truer portrayal of a Celtic woman – far truer than later medieval versions, which depict the ladies of the Arthurian myth as weak, ethereal and highly susceptible to sin, fainting from fear or love and helpless without a knight's aid.

In Thomas Malory's account, Guinevere entered a convent in the epilogue to the legend to atone for her sins – and there she spent her days in penance, peace and quiet (*...had a good ende*).

In a similar vein, the Nobel laureate Sigrid Undset, author of one of the finest adaptations of the Arthurian myth, seeks peace.

Morgana

There is a fairy named Morgana
Who bestows gold upon various peoples...

Boiardo, **Orlando Inamorato**

In the oldest, Welsh version of the myth, Arthur had a sister named Gwyar. Geoffrey of Monmouth also gives the king a sister, whom he calls Anna, however – a gibberish Welsh name that Geoffrey presumably did not consider suitable even for a horse or a greyhound.

According to the classic and generally accepted version, however, it is the other sisters who matter: Morgana and Morgause.

Morgana, Morgaine, Morgian, Morgan la Fée (Le Fay) was a sorceress. An evil sorceress. The name she bears in the legend (and that of her sister too) can easily be traced back to the fearsome Morrigan, the goddess of war, blood and death, the very same who, in Irish lore, took a particular dislike to the valiant Cuchulainn.

Morgana was Arthur's half-sister. She and her sister Morgause were the biological daughters of Igerne and Gorlois of Cornwall. Neither had any reason to look kindly upon their mother's relationship with Uther Pendragon, their father's murderer. Nor upon the fruit of that union – Arthur.

Morgana was a woman of extraordinary beauty and talent. *The Vulgate* states that, and I quote, 'she was cheerful by nature and inclined to merriment, and sang most beautifully; she had lovely hands, perfect arms, and skin smoother than silk. Her manners were refined; she was tall and of upright bearing; in short, she was alluring beyond all imagination. Moreover, she was the most passionate and licentious woman in all of Britain...'

In the classic version of the myth (Malory), Morgana acted swiftly – when Arthur married her off to King Uriens of Rheged, she organised, together with her own stepson (and lover) Acolon, an attempt on Arthur's life; and when this failed, she fled to the land of Gore. She loved Akkolon to the point of madness and, unable to forgive Arthur for killing him, hatched a truly diabolical plot – she sent the king-

She gave him a beautiful robe, which was poisoned – it was meant to act like Dejanira's dress and burn Arthur alive. However, thanks to a warning from the Lady of the Lake, Arthur survived.

Morgana never ceased in her efforts to cause harm – she plotted, abducted and imprisoned knights (including Tristan and Lancelot, with whom she had fallen in love), and maintained a veritable army of spies in Camelot in the form of her maids. The culmination of her scheming was a ploy straight out of the darkest propaganda. Morgana presented Tristan with a shield bearing the following image: at the bottom, the king and queen; and above them, trampling on their crowned heads, a knight. Tristan (proving himself to be a complete fool) appeared with the shield at a tournament in Camelot… and the court was abuzz with rumours. The meaning of the image was immediately guessed – Arthur, Guinevere and Lancelot, who was bringing shame upon them. It wasn't long before Agravain and Mordred's conspiracy, which sparked the war and the kingdom's downfall, came to fruition*.

Interestingly, in the epilogue to the legend, Morgan reconciles with Arthur. When the king dies on the battlefield at Camlann, his sister cradles his head in her lap and speaks tender words to her brother. She is also one of the four queens who accompany the king on his final journey to Avalon.

In *fantasy* literature, the most beautiful – because it is far from clichéd – portrayal of Morgana (Morgaine) can be found in Marion Zimmer Bradley's **The Mists of Avalon** *. There's no point in summarising or recounting it here – you simply have to read it.

I think that for all those who have adapted the myth, the appeal of this character (as an antagonist) stemmed from the evocative root 'mor' (*mors, la morte*, death). The same applies to Morgause and Mordred, described below. In Welsh, however, the root *'mor'* is associated with the sea, not with death. 'Morgan' means 'Born of the Sea' in Celtic. But the analogy is there – the sea, as we recall, symbolises all the forces of evil for the Welsh.

* In *the Vulgate*, things are slightly different: Lancelot, imprisoned by Morgana, draws a comic strip on the walls of his cell – the story of his love for Guinevere. In great detail. Morgana, for her part, made sure at the first opportunity that Arthur saw the paintings so he could see for himself just how impressive the horns they'd given him were. Well, just as disgusting a ploy as in Malory's version.

Morgause

Morgause (Morgas, Morgawse), also a sorceress, was Morgana's full sister. She became the wife of King Lot of Lothian and the Orkney Islands and bore him four sons, all of whom (including the famous Gawain) became Knights of the Round Table. As for the actual paternity of these sons, however, there may be some doubt, for although Lot himself was renowned as a womaniser, Morgause was no less so – she cheated on him with great zeal and without much regard for appearances. She had quite the temperament, to say the least. When Ectorius once arrived in Lothian with the young Kai and Arthur, the future king was consumed by lust for his half-sister. He desired her because, as *the Vulgate* puts it, 'she was fair and plump'. When King Lot went out at night to relieve himself, Arthur slipped into Morgause's bed. *The Vulgate* informs us that 'at that time she pleased him beautifully, and he her', from which it must be inferred that Lot must have spent quite some time in the lavatory.

And so Mordred was conceived. The downfall of Arthur and Camelot.

Even as a widow, after Lot had been slain by King Pellinor, Morgause continued to 'please' one man after another. Her last great love – the one that led to her downfall – was the knight Lamorak.

Some versions of the legend (and *fantasy* books) equate Morgana with Morgause or confuse the two – particularly on the crucial point: which of them became Arthur's lover and bore Mordred by him. One thing, however, is always clear – it happened either through sorcery or through lust fuelled by the devil. A decent king, unless under an evil spell or the influence of Satan, would not have slept with his sister or 'flattered her so beautifully'. At least, no Christian king in the Christian Middle Ages would have done so. For in mythologies – including Welsh mythology – this happened not only to kings, but also to gods.

In **The Mists of Avalon**, Morgause also appears, but as Igerne's younger sister – and thus an aunt, not Morgana's sister. And there is nothing improper between her and Arthur – Morgana's mother…

Morgaine is the very embodiment of dread. In Marion Zimmer Bradley's version, Arthur's encounter with his half-sister is stripped of elements of black magic and sinful lust – it takes place during the Beltane mystery and forms part of the Celtic coronation ritual for Arthur. When Arthur and Morgaine make love, they do not recognise each other – she is the May Queen, he is the May King. This does not alter the fact that the consequences are – as is classic – tragic.

In other *fantasy* works, both sisters (or one of them, whichever is on duty) are always monstrous witches, Queens of the Air and Darkness. In Terence H. White's work, Morgause even boils a cat alive as part of her magical practices, and for something like that, I myself would gladly set fire to the pyre with my own hands.

Mordred

The villain of the legend from the very earliest versions. One can therefore assume he is a historical figure, just like Arthur. A relative of the king, he was no more fond of his uncle than Cymbeline's offspring were once fond of their father. And he seized the first opportunity to reach for power himself. If we are to go by the apocryphal chronicle of William of Malmesbury, Mordred (Medraut, Medrawt, Modred) staged a palace coup whilst the king was away, taking the opportunity to lay hands on the queen as well. Having allied himself with the Saxons, he seized control of the kingdom. Arthur, however, managed to muster an army of supporters of the old regime and clashed with the usurper at Camlann. Both Arthur and Mordred lost their lives in that battle, and chaos and darkness reigned in the land.

This, it is said, was one possible historical account of events. For it cannot be ruled out that Mordred is simply playing a role in the legend that Welsh mythology has written for him. Mordred is none other than Dylan, the evil brother of the good Lleu, who ultimately meets his end at the hands of his uncle, the blacksmith Govannan. Alternatively, Mordred is Pryderi ap Pwyll, that Troublemaker, the schemer, the prince of darkness, defeated in a symbolic battle by the radiant Gwydion... Pa-

Do you remember Zimmer Bradley's **The Mists of Avalon** ? There it is stated clearly and without beating about the bush: Gwydion is the real name of both Arthur and his son, whilst Mordred is a Saxon epithet, which can be translated as 'Evil Omen'. Nothing more, nothing less. In Welsh, 'Medrawt' means 'He Who Strikes' or 'He Who Decides Boldly'.

As we already know, in the classical legend Mordred was Arthur's illegitimate son, and to make matters worse, conceived with his own half-sister. In the Church's adaptations, the king thus committed a doubly terrible sin and was bound to bring a monstrous disaster upon the land as a result. This incest and extramarital infidelity were clearly derived from the original Welsh version, but there they probably did not shock anyone. After all, the Welsh Prometheus, Gwydion, fathered the Sun God Lleu—the most beautiful and most revered deity of the British pantheon—with his own sister, Arianrod. And the child of illicit union, the illegitimate son of King Arthur's sister, known as Gwyar, is Gwalchmei, the Falcon of May, the Welsh Gawain, the favourite hero of chivalric sagas.

In the classical legend (and in *fantasy*), Mordred is Arthur's only offspring – his union with Guinevere remains childless. In Welsh legends, Arthur has four sons, named Llacheu, Amr, Cydfan and Archfedd. Whether they were all born in wedlock, we do not know – but they all use the patronymic 'ap Arthur'.

In Malory's account, the scene of Mordred's death at Camlann is truly gruesome. In battle with his son, Arthur pierces him with a lance, so that a good fathom of the shaft protrudes from Mordred's back. With a final effort, Mordred impales himself deeper onto the shaft – he leans on the small shield of the lance that protects his hand and, from this position, strikes his father on the head, shattering his helmet and skull.

The Lady of the Lake

She is sometimes called Viviana, Vivienne, Vivien, Nimue, Nimiane or Niniane. All these names are simply variations on the name Rhiannon, the beautiful wife of Pwyl-

, ruler of Annwvyn, the Welsh Wonderland, and later the wife of Manawyddan, son of Llyr.

In the legend, the Lady of the Lake plays two important roles. Firstly, it is she who presents Arthur with the magical sword Excalibur, a symbol of power. Interestingly, none of the subsequent versions of the myth attempted to alter this event; not even the *Vulgate* Cycle sought to remove the 'pagan' sorceress from the text and have the sword presented to Arthur by heavenly angels or one of the saints. And this event leads straight back to Celtic mythology – to the goddess Arianrod, who armed her son Lleu in a similar manner.

Secondly, the Lady of the Lake is (in the *Vulgate* Cycle) Lancelot's foster mother, having abducted him as an infant. It is from the Lady of the Lake that Lancelot receives his name – as we recall, he was named Galahad at his baptism. And once again we have a reference to the Welsh Arianrod, who, after all, not only equipped Lleu but also named him Llaw Gyffes.

There is a theory that women played an enormous role in Celtic society. In many myths (such as that of Cuchulainn), the hero must undergo training under a woman – a sorceress or a warrior. In many legends, it is the privilege of the mother, guardian or priestess to bestow a name upon the boy and present him with a weapon. This is likely linked to the cult of the Triple Great Mother described above, which was deeply rooted among the Celts. Arthur's initiation, as described in **The Mists of Avalon** – a symbolic act of love, a ritual of fertility and abundance, in which the ruler assumes the duties of lover, guardian and husband to the Earth, personified as a woman, the Great Goddess, and symbolised by a virgin priestess – derives from ancient Celtic rites. In a similar vein, the Wiccan Diana Paxson (**The White Raven**) describes the wedding night of King Mark and 'Iseult' (who was at that time disguised as the maid Branghien), demonstrating that every marriage of a Celtic ruler took place through a similar mystery rite*.

* The ritual involving a mare and a bath in broth does not appear in *fantasy* literature. Nor is there any mention of it in certain serious, scholarly works on the Celts. It is therefore either dismissed as a fairy tale, or it is assumed that it took place only in deeply

Thomas Malory punished the Lady of the Lake for 'paganism and sorcery', introducing into the legend a modern symbolism of the triumph of the New over the Old. The Lady of the Lake had arrived at Camelot to demand, as part of some rather obscure vendetta, the head of the good knight Balin – as the price for the sword Excalibur she had given to the king. When Arthur objected, the righteous, Christian knight Balin seized his sword and 'before the eyes of the king, the queen and the entire court, he cut off the witch's head with great ease'. But although the good knight Balin acted chivalrously and in accordance with the letter of Scripture ("You shall not allow a sorceress to live", Exodus 22:18)*, everyone nevertheless regarded this act as disgraceful and unworthy of a knight. Balin was sentenced to banishment. I describe his subsequent fate under the entry: 'Balin and Balan'.

There were several Ladies of the Lake, as can be inferred from Malory's **Le Morte...** Malory, there were several. The one who gave Arthur his sword and was slain by Balin was called Lile. However, right up until the end of the legend, another Lady of the Lake appears and aids Arthur and his knights. At times, one might infer that this Lady is Nimue, the one who seduced Merlin. In the finale *of *Le Morte Darthur** (and in James Archer's painting of the same title, inspired by Malory's text), however, Arthur is escorted to Avalon

the primordial culture of the Celts. Just as the macabre Druidic ritual of burning people alive in wicker pyres was replaced by the burning of sacrificial animals or their dummies, the unsavoury act of sodomy with a mare was replaced by a more natural, pleasurable – and decidedly safer – act with a priestess posing as a mare.

* The Bible condemns to death only women who practise witchcraft. Witches are not allowed to live, whilst not a word is said about male sorcerers. Numerous papal encyclicals and *the* infamous **Malleus Maleficarum** later followed the path laid out by the Holy Scriptures, describing women as: 'the breeding ground of all evil since the dawn of time'. This is, of course, the belated revenge of men and their male god upon the still-menacing Great Goddess. It is the age-old male fear of the feminine element, which naturally dominates the natural world. A fear which, combined with repressed desires, compelled – and continues to compel – hypocritical sanctimonious figures to seek out *a 'toothed vagina'* in every woman.

Four queens – Morgana, the Ruler of Northgales (North Wales – could she be a druidess from the Isle of Anglesey?), the Queen of the Barren Lands (Perceval's aunt) and, indeed, Nimue. So – four. But if that is the case, there must have been a fifth! For to whom did the hand belong that Bedivere sees, the hand that grasps Excalibur as it is cast into the waves? The four queens are with Arthur on the barge; the fifth is underwater with Excalibur. I can see no other explanation – apart from sorcery. It follows that Marion Zimmer Bradley may be right in treating the Lady of the Lake (much like Merlin) as a title, office or druidic function. Thus, the retired druidesses sail off with Arthur to Avalon, leaving a successor in the Lake.

In Layamon's **Brut** – when the dying Arthur sails off to Avalon, he tells Constantine, son of Cador, that he is sailing to Queen Argante. Joseph Campbell considers this name to be a corruption of 'Morgant', that is, Morgana.

Ladies of the Lake, both Morgana and Argante (as Morgante and Urganda) found their way into fifteenth-century Italian chivalric epics – into Boiardo's **Orlando Innamorato** and Ariosto's **Orlando Furioso **. Morgana also appears in Bernardo Tasso's **Amadigi **. Meanwhile, the mirages observed in the Strait of Messina were called *Fata Morgana* (literally: the sorceress Morgana) and were attributed precisely to the sorcery practised by Morgana, *la Donna del Lago*. Indeed, the Celtic Valkyrie Morrigan has come a long way...

In **The Mists of Avalon**, all the priestesses of the Great Goddess – Vivien, Niniane and Morgaine – are Ladies of the Lake, that is, of a mist-shrouded island on a lake near Glastonbury, on which stands a centre of worship dedicated to the Great Mother. The very young Nimue, however, having lost Merlin-Kevyn, takes her own life.

In Tolkien's work, I see two Celtic Ladies of the Lake – Arwen, the Evening Star, who presents Aragorn with his banner (the symbol of the rightful king Elessar) and – of course – Galadriel, Lady of the Forest of Lórien, who sails across the sea from the Grey Havens together with Frodo.

I have already mentioned that in Tennyson's **Vulgate* Cycle* and **Idylls of the King**, the Lady of the Lake is called Vivien (Viviana). *The Vulgate* traces this name back to Chaldean origins. It is said to mean 'I Do Not Even Dream'. Vivien used these words for a long time in response to Merlin's pleas – until the moment the magician succumbed to her completely. Perhaps it will now be easier for readers to understand how I, a humble *fantasy* author, conceived the sorceress Yennefer, the beloved of the witcher Geralt. A woman who would not dream of yielding when she has no desire to do so.

Lancelot of the Lake

One day, for our pleasure, we were reading
Of Lancelot, how love took hold of him...

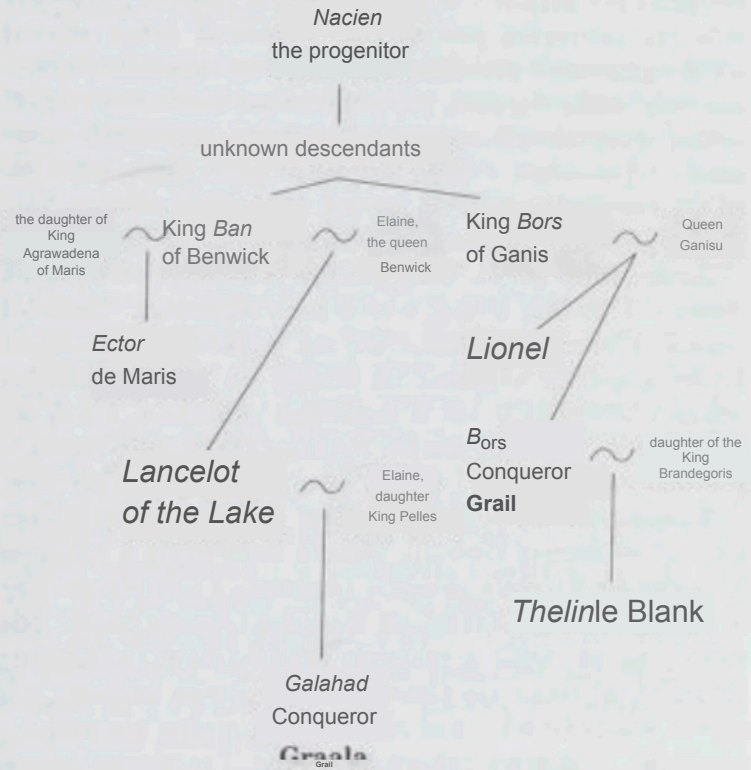
Dante

Also known as Launcelot, Lanzelet and Lancelet. A French addition to the myth – Chrétien de Troyes introduces this character, and all subsequent authors (Armand Daniel, Gautier Map, the Cistercians, Ulrik von Zatzikhoven, Malory) respect the knight's nationality, regularly bestowing upon him the French epithet *'du Lac*'. Nevertheless, this *'lac'* is most likely not a lake at all, but a Celtic, mythological element adopted and adapted by Chrétien: Lancelot, the sun and the flower of chivalry, is a figure derived directly from the sun god Lugh Lamh-fada or Lleu Llaw Gyffes – he personifies the sun, summer, and the burst and blossoming of vital forces.

In the canonical version of the myth, Lancelot was the son of the Gallic King Ban of Benwick. As for his maternal lineage, however, there are two legendary versions. According to the first, the knight was the product of a royal affair – his mother was the sorceress Vivien, the Lady of the Lake. According to the second (more common version, e.g. *the Vulgate* Cycle), Lancelot's mother was Elaine, King Ban's lawful wife. The Lady of the Lake, however, abducted Lancelot as an infant to raise him in the Lake, in the Enchanted Realm.

The child (in both versions) arrives at the Lake under his real name, Galahad, but leaves as

The *Lineage* of Lancelot of the Lake



Lancelot du Lac (symbolism, symbolism!), so that, together with his half-brother Ector de Maris and his kinsmen Bors, Lionel, Blamor and Bleoberis, he might join the ranks of the Knights of the Round Table – and quickly become renowned as the finest and most famous of them all, King Arthur's closest companion. The tragic love between Lancelot and Guinevere, leading to a double betrayal – of a friend and of a sovereign – is the central theme of the classic version of the myth. This love – though beautiful and long-lasting

serving as a model for lovers (Dante's Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini) – is a ruinous and destructive love. For in the legend it was thus:

After the quest for the Grail had ended, Lancelot broke the vow of chastity he had previously taken – he resumed his nightly visits to Guinevere's bedchamber. Morgana's villainous plot, described above, was already in motion – the knight and the queen's illicit love affair was already an open secret. Since Arthur seemed either oblivious to his wife's and vassal's infidelity or to be turning a blind eye, a plot was hatched. At the instigation of Mordred and Agravain, Gawain's brothers, twelve knights organise an ambush on Lancelot – their aim is to catch him *in the act* in Guinevere's bed and thereby force the king to act, presenting him with irrefutable evidence and *a fait accompli*.

Taken by surprise by the conspirators, Lancelot draws his sword – and bodies fall, including that of Agravain. Lancelot flees, and Arthur truly has no choice – the unchaste queen is sentenced to death at the stake. Lancelot returns and rescues her – but in the chaotic melee that ensues, many Knights of the Round Table are slain – including Gaheris and Garet, two of Gawain's distant brothers.

A war breaks out, with the vengeful Gawain at its forefront. The royal armies, led by Arthur and Gawain, lay siege to Lancelot and his supporters in the castle known as*Joyous Gard*. Unable to bear the thought of spilling his brother's blood, the noble Lancelot renounces Guinevere and returns her to the king. But even then Gawain is relentless; the fighting continues – it is only halted by Mordred's rebellion. And then Lancelot rushes to Arthur's aid – but arrives too late. Arthur and Mordred are dead; Guinevere is in a convent. Lancelot becomes a hermit, falls gravely ill and dies shortly afterwards.

The most beautiful and psychologically rich portrayal of Lancelot can be found in the works of Terence H. White. I hesitate to add even a single word – please read it for yourself. Marion Zimmer Bradley also devotes considerable space to Lancelot.

A completely different account of the subsequent fate (following the Battle of Camlann) of Lancelot, Guinevere and Elaine can be found, however, in Parke Godwin's**The Beloved Exile**. For those who haven't read it, a word of warning: the tragedy is not over. The tragedy is only just beginning...

Elaine… Elaine… Elaine…

In the classic version of the legend (Malory), there are several characters with this name, which would seem to confirm that they all had a single mythological prototype. Elaine (Helena) is the name given to Lancelot's mother, the wife of King Ban of Benwick. The name Elaine is also borne by the virgin daughter of King Pellinor, Perceval's sister, who accompanies the seekers of the Grail (until her death). Another Elaine is the wife of King Nentres (Uriens?). Some versions of the Welsh legend also give the name Elen to… Merlin's (Myrddin's) wife.

Most important, however, are two other Elaines – the clever daughter of King Pelles and Elaine, known as the Virgin Lily of Astolat (called the Lady of Shalott by Alfred Tennyson, and the Maiden of Escalot by *the Vulgate*).

The fair maiden of Astolat, daughter of Duke Bernard, is a sad and tragic figure. For she fell madly in love – though her love was unrequited – with Lancelot of the Lake, to such an extent that, because of this love, 'she could neither sleep, nor eat, nor drink'; so, as one might easily guess, she died. She had her body, clad in black and covered with a shroud of black brocade, carried all the way to Camelot. When Lancelot saw this, he felt rather faint.

Elaine of Astolat is, as can be seen, a character who fits neatly into the narrative – although she also appears in *the Vulgate*, I regard her as an unmistakable creation of the French troubadours from the school of *'amour courtois*'. Lancelot, a noble knight, cannot return Elaine's love, for he loves Guinevere. Echoes of this character can be heard in Tolkien's work. The noble Aragorn cannot return the love of Éowyn, Princess of Rohan, and rightly regards this as one of the most painful blows that can be dealt to a man's heart. Éowyn, too, seeks death (though in a more Celtic manner – in battle), but

the benevolent Tolkien does not allow her to suffer the fate of Lily of Astolat. The undersigned, in creating the character of the poetess Oczko (*A Little Sacrifice*), had no intention of being quite so kind – Oczko, like Elaine, stood no chance.

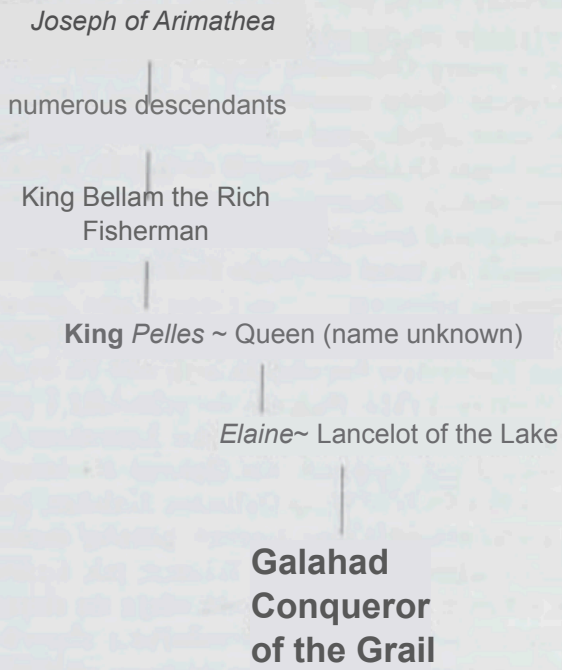
The other important Elaine, daughter of King Pelles, was also hopelessly in love with Lancelot (the fellow certainly had a knack for that name!). The princess, unlike Lilia of Astolat, had no intention of wasting away in vain, however. She showed initiative and took the lead. When the knight was a guest at her father's castle, she slipped into his bed under cover of darkness, using perfumes familiar to Lancelot whilst pretending to be Guinevere. When dawn broke and the deception was revealed, Lancelot was so furious that he drew his sword – Elaine's life hung by a thread. Well, he was, after all, a righteous and honourable knight. The deed was *done*, and the consequences had to be faced. And those consequences turned out to be Galahad.

Galahad

The *Vulgate* monks, who, as we already know, invented Galahad, also concocted a fitting legend, according to which Elaine, daughter of King Pelles and granddaughter of King Pellam the Fisherman, knew that her union with Lancelot would produce a son who would win the Grail. Elaine sacrificed her virginity (did she close her eyes and think of England?) because she knew she would give birth to a child of destiny who would outshine not only his famous father, but also Arthur and all the other Knights of the Round Table. And she gave birth – in the manner just described. And she was surely absolved by the Archbishop of Canterbury – who else?

Galahad grew up to be a valiant knight and arrived at Camelot. At the Round Table, as we know, there was a chair which no one dared to occupy – the Perilous Seat, *Siege Perilous*. Only the Chosen One, destined for great things, was to sit there – as the wise Merlin had prophesied. And Galahad came and took his seat. Then a sword appeared, stuck in a boulder floating on the water, and inscribed on the boulder were the words that whoever drew the sword, etc. And Galahad drew it. And then he found the Grail. And he died.

Galahad's *lineage*



Malory adopted Galahad from the *Vulgate* Cycle without any changes – Galahad is as he is; everyone can see that. Galahad does not appear in any other version of the myth. However, in Welsh legends there is a character called Gwalchaved or Gwalhafad (Falcon of Summer). Gwalchaved is the brother of Gwalchmea – the Falcon of May, that is, Gawain. He has nothing to do with the Grail (in any form).

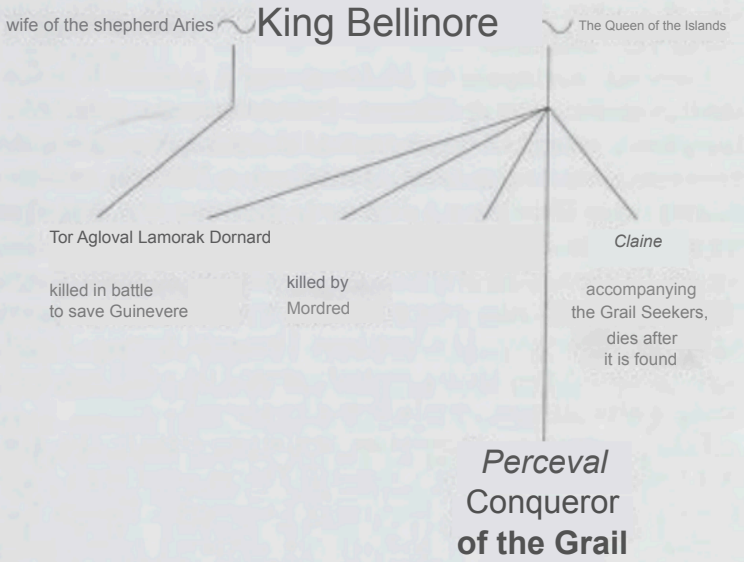
One matter concerning Galahad certainly requires clarification. For the winner of the Grail has, after all,

a blemish that absolutely must be washed away. Now, in his highly intriguing **Dictionary of Myths and Cultural Traditions**, Władysław Kopaliński claims that Galahad appears in Dante's **Divine Comedy** under the name Galeotto. Galeotto, that is, Galahad, was supposedly the one who brought about the first romantic tryst between Lancelot and Guinevere. Francesca and Paolo, the lovers in Dante's work whom we have already mentioned, kiss for the first time (and more besides) whilst reading this very passage from the legend. As the poet puts it, 'the book and the writer were Galeotto' – the romantic passage they read together made Paolo and Francesca realise their love for one another, inspiring them to kiss and embrace. For this reason, Galeotto (that is, Galahad) entered the Italian language as a synonym for a pimp, a procurer, a vile man. Władysław Kopaliński laments that such a virtuous and righteous knight as Galahad should, thanks to Dante, have been given such a vile and insulting eponym.

I hasten to defend Galahad and his good name! Władysław Kopaliński is mistaken! That is not how it happened at all! According to the *Vulgate* Cycle, it was not Galahad but Galehot (Galehault, Galahaut), known as the Lord of the Far Islands, who brought about the tryst and the first (beautifully described) kiss between Lancelot and Guinevere. Galehot, initially an enemy of King Arthur and his knights, later became close friends with Lancelot. Seeing how Lancelot and Guinevere were pining for love yet dared not draw near to one another, Galehot took on the role of go-between and facilitated their tryst. What is more, so as not to expose the queen to gossip on account of a *tête-à-tête* with a man who was not her husband, he was present during the rendezvous, thanks to which the lovers' first kiss – in accordance with the requirements *of amour courtois* – appeared innocent.

And it is Galehot – not Galahad – who is Dante's Galeotto, and it is he who deserves the eponym. The righteous and pure Galahad, the Conqueror of the Grail, facilitated no – I repeat, no – trysts whatsoever!

Perceval's *Code*



Perceval

...Sir Percivale,
whom Arthur and his knights called the Pure.
Tennyson

Conceived by Chrétien de Troyes, continued by *the Vulgate* and Wolfram von Eschenbach (Parsifal, Parzival), he finally appears in **Le Morte Darthur** as Sir Percival de Gales (of Wales).

He was the son of King Pellinor, who was killed as a result of a vendetta with the brothers from the Orkney Islands, and the brother of Lamorak, who lost his life in a similar manner. His mother, wishing to protect Perceval

from his father's fate, raised him in isolation and in ignorance of the existence of knighthood. Of course, this isolation did not help; Perceval became a knight and achieved great renown.

In Chrétien de Troyes's work, Perceval is the first knight to see the Grail. However, still being a simpleton, he hesitates to ask a question about the nature of the mystery he is witnessing and misses his chance. For a time, at least. For later, in some versions of the myth, he is the conqueror of the Grail. In other versions, he is also the conqueror, but only as Galahad's companion.

Perceval appears in *the Mabinogion* and Welsh ballads as Peredur ap Efrawc. The branch *of the Mabinogion* dedicated to him—the tale of a simpleton who longed to become a knight—is virtually identical to the story told by Chrétien, and it is truly unclear who drew inspiration from whom. However, the name Peredur is too easily derived from Pryderi to doubt that it was precisely the mythical son of Pwyll who served as the prototype for poets and bards, at least the Welsh ones. In Chrétien's work, Perceval (*percer à val*, meaning 'to break through', 'to go straight ahead', 'straight to the goal') clearly has its own symbolic meaning.

German poets, developing the Grail theme (following in the footsteps of Galahad from *the Vulgate*), gave Perceval a son (or *alter ego*) – the popular Lohengrin, the Swan Knight. The creator of this character did not leave his surname to posterity. That is why Lohengrin will forever be associated with Richard Wagner's opera.

The Germans not only gave Perceval a son, but also a grandfather. Wolfram von Eschenbach left behind fragments of a work entitled **Der ältere Titurel**, whilst Albrecht von Scharfenberg wrote a work titled **Der jüngere Titurel**. The eponymous Titurel is none other than Perceval's grandfather – one of the former Guardians of the Grail.

Two further points of interest: in Wolfram von Eschenbach's work, Parsifal is consistently referred to as the 'Son of the Widow', which later served as a starting point for investigations into links between the Grail legend and Freemasonry. Secondly: Perceval and Lohengrin (and thus Joseph of Arimathea, to whom both are related in Wolfram's work) are considered direct

direct descendants of Godfrey of Bouillon, the leader of the First Crusade.

As the archetype of the righteous, honest simpleton with a pure heart and intentions, longing to become something more, and consequently bringing to that 'something' his own simplicity and the great humanism inherent in that simplicity, Perceval-Pere-dur rides through world literature like a Don Cossack across the steppe.

Gawain

One of Arthur's earliest-mentioned companions – Walwen in William of Malmesbury, Walgan in Geoffrey of Monmouth. A figure who frequently appears in Welsh legends, though under the name Gwalchmei ap Gwyar. Gwalchmei means 'Falcon of May'; the patronymic is interesting – it is actually a matronymic. Gwyar was King Arthur's sister, and Gwalchmei her illegitimate son. This is likely why, in later versions of the legend, Gawain (Gawaine, Gauvin, Gawen, Gowen) was also made a fairly close relative of the king: the son of Lot, ruler of Lothian and the Orkney Islands, and Morgause, Arthur's half-sister. And since Arthur fathered Mordred with Morgause, the family ties become even more complicated – Gawain now has as his king and companion someone who is both his mother's half-brother and the father of his half-brother...

Gawain was the eldest son of Lot and Morgause, and the brother of Agravain, Gaheris and Gareth. In Terence H. White's account, the brothers – plus their half-brother Mordred – form a group not particularly friendly towards Arthur, known as the Orkney faction. Lot's sons also appear in a similar role in Malory's work.

Gawain is one of the legend's favourite heroes – though it is sometimes hard to understand why – as his adventures consist, for the most part, of one unbroken string of murders, including those of women. And one great vendetta – Gawain, avenging his father, murders Pellinor – and takes his seat at the Round Table alongside the sons of the slain man. He kills Uwain – and nothing happens.

He takes part in the treacherous murder of Lamorak – and remains Arthur's favourite.

And it is he, and no one else, who initiates the quest for the Grail.

Of course, Gawain has no right to find the Grail. Gawain is a woodcutter. He is an 'earthly' knight – not to say 'mundane'. Besides, Gawain succumbs to temptation far too often; he finds it particularly hard to resist beautiful ladies (whom Malory calls *'damosels'* – I don't know about you, but that word makes me laugh until I cry). As an uncontrollable sinner, Gawain – though he is the initiator of the quest for the Grail – loses the chance even to catch a glimpse of the holy vessel; in the myth, he serves as a plot-driven contrast to the blameless and virtuous Galahad, who remains unmoved by any damsels or temptations.

The myth's canon assigns Gawain an important, yet unpleasant and difficult role... and, as a result, a tragic one. His comrade Lancelot turns out to be not only Guinevere's lover, but also the murderer of his brothers – Agravain, Gaheris and Gareth. Gawain had forgiven his friend much – he had opposed the plan devised by Mordred and Agravain, who were preparing an ambush in Guinevere's bedchamber. But the murders of his brothers – and the proven betrayal of Arthur – are things Gawain cannot forgive. He pursues Lancelot relentlessly and inexorably, and finally dies from wounds inflicted by his former friend.

In Malory's account, on the night before the Battle of Camlann, Gawain's spirit visits Arthur in a dream, warns the king against confronting Mordred, and – regretting his own obstinacy – suggests reconciliation with Lancelot and Guinevere. But it is already too late...

Gawain appears in all literary works devoted to King Arthur. He is also the hero of his own work: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (late 14th century). The authorship of this romance is attributed to the anonymous author *of the* famous *'Pearl'*, considered one of the greatest achievements of English poetry of the time. In Geoffrey Chaucer's **The Canterbury Tales**, on the other hand, the famous marriage of Gawain is described: for the sake of honour, he married an old and hideous witch, but did not lose his honour, for on their wedding night the witch transformed into a very young

and lovely maiden. Sigrid Undset incorporated this story into the canon of Arthurian legend in her work **Kong Artur og ridderne av det Runge Bord**.

Sir Gawaine ap Lot is the hero of the *fantasy* novel **The Kingdom of Summer**, written by Gillian Bradshaw.

As Malory writes, as late as the fifteenth century, a decayed human skull, said to be Gawain's, could still be seen at Dover Castle.

Garet

The youngest brother of Gawain, Agravain and Gaheris. An ambitious fellow, he arrived in Camelot incognito, not wishing to benefit from any favour due to his kinship with the already famous sons of Lot, the knights from the Orkney Islands. He wanted to be accepted into the ranks of the Knights of the Round Table on the strength of his own deeds. As is often the case when someone foolishly fails to make use of their connections, the ambitious simpleton ended up in the castle kitchen, washing pots and pans. And the spiteful seneschal, Kai, made his life as miserable as he could, even giving him the embarrassing nickname *Beaumains*, 'Beautiful Hand' – for the boy had white hands unaccustomed to hard labour.

Despite this, Garet never ceased in his attempts to forge a career of his own. When the beautiful damsel Lineta arrived at Arthur's castle, asking for help for her sister, Lionessa, who was besieged by renegade knights, 'Beautiful Hand' immediately volunteered for the mission, beating the others to it. Arthur agreed, which drove Lineta into a rage. 'What do you mean?' she shouted, her voice echoing throughout Camelot. 'I'm asking for a knight, and you're giving me this brat, this kitchen boy?' But Arthur was unyielding. A mission is a mission; first come, first served, and so it was either Beaumains or no one.

Lineta teased 'Pretty Hands' all the way there, mocking him at every opportunity. "What sort of knight are you, you beardless lad?" she repeated. "You reek of borscht. You belong on a spit, you pot-bellied oaf, not wielding a sword." But Garet endured the taunts with stoic calm, and upon arriving at their destination, he set about

work. He either cut down or forced the nasty knights besieging Lionessa's castle to surrender, whilst Lionessa watched from her little window. Garet looked into the window and immediately fell in love with Lionessa, and the feeling was mutual.

Garet 'Beautiful Hand' took after neither his father, Lot, nor his brother Gawain, who would have slept with the damsel in a *'wham, bam, thank you, ma'am'* sort of way. Garet married and was a faithful husband. In short. His friend, Lancelot, who had personally knighted Garet, later personally – though, in fact, by accident – struck him down whilst defending Guinevere's honour and life.

Lionessa's sister, the sharp-tongued Lineta, was married to Gareth's brother, Gaheris. Lineta, too, as we already know, became a widow. On the very same day.

La Cote Male Taile

In Malory's account, this knight's story is practically identical to that of Gareth. He arrived at Camelot incognito, and as he was wearing clothes sewn by some poor tailor, he was given the mocking nickname 'The Knight in the Ill-Cut Cloak' (*La Cote Male Taile*) by the mischievous Kai. When a damsel appeared at Arthur's castle asking for help, La Cote Male Taile volunteered. We know the rest: he won many victories, married the damsel, and became a Knight of the Round Table. His real name was Breunor the Black, but he was not ashamed of the nickname Kai had given him and became widely known as La Cote Male Taile.

The question arises: why did Malory decide to repeat, almost verbatim, the tale of a knight with an embarrassing nickname? In my opinion, it was a matter of making up for the lack of narrative consistency that had arisen in Gareth's story. Linet, who appears in Camelot, is initially an antagonist to Fair Hand; she is hostile and prejudiced towards him, and can scarcely bear to look at him. During their journey together, the conflict gradually eases, admiration grows, and a bond of affection develops between Lineta and Garet, which – just as we expect –

might turn into something more… and suddenly Garet chooses Lineta's sister, Lionessa. And Lineta, the heroine of the story, must settle for Gaheris and the role of Garet's sister-in-law. In the tale of *La Cote Male Taile*, this plot flaw is absent – the knight marries none other than his initial antagonist, the damsel who teased him, whose favour he gradually wins as the story unfolds.

Le Bel Inconnu

This character – though extremely similar to the previous two and undoubtedly the source for both – does not appear at all in classical mythology. He is, however, the hero of a French romance written around 1190 by the troubadour Renaud de Beaujeu. The knight Guinglain of Wales arrives incognito at Arthur's court – because he is exceptionally handsome, he is given the nickname 'The Handsome Stranger' – *Le Bel Inconnu*. The handsome knight embarks on *a* chivalric *quest* to rescue the lovely Esmeralda. He endures numerous hair-raising adventures, rescues her, marries her, and so on.

In creating Guinglain, Renaud de Beaujeu probably drew on some Celtic model – most likely the tale of Peredur, or Perceval. The same applies to Amadis of Gaul and Palmerin, knights similar to Guinglain, created by anonymous Portuguese or Castilian poets in the 14th century.

As well as the French Perceforest.

Kai

Presumably a contemporary of Arthur, the son of the knight Ectorius, to whom Merlin entrusted the future king for upbringing. Such upbringing was a very widespread custom amongst the Celts, known as *altram*, translated into English as *'fosterage'*. By no means were only orphaned children subject *to altram* – children with their own parents and siblings were also given into foster care. In this way, the child gained two families.

Altram formed an exceptionally strong bond – if we bear this in mind, we can understand that Arthur must have regarded Ectorius as a father and Kai as a brother. It is therefore no surprise that, from the earliest versions of the myth, Kai is very close to Arthur. In Camelot, he holds the high office of seneschal (steward of the court) – and is, in the legend, the only (significant) Knight of the Round Table to hold an official position – apart from Lukan (Bedivere's brother), who was the cupbearer.

In the French versions, the knight's name is written as *Queux*, which means cook or steward. It is from this version, in the Polish translation (by Kossak-Szczucka), that Kaia (and not Lukan) became 'Keus the cupbearer'. Boy-Żeleński (*in* his **The Story of Tristan and Isolde** by Bédier) translates Kaia as 'Marshal Ke'.

The name Kaia is also spelled as Kay, Keie, Cai or Kei. Under the latter spelling, which is closest to the spirit of the Welsh Celtic language, the knight appears in Welsh legends. His patronymic is ap Kynyr. Thus, he is the son of Kynyr, not Ectorius. However, if one were to accept the Roman version of Ectorius, then Kai would simply be… Caius or Gaius. *Ubi tu Gaius, ibi ego Gaia…*

Whether Roman or ap Kynyr, in the legends of the Britons, Kai is endowed with many of the traits of Cuchulainn, a hero dear to the Celts – particularly when it comes to his legendary physical attributes. Kai was capable of staying underwater for nine days and nights without stopping to eat. At will, he could grow as tall as a pine tree, and fire would blaze around his head whenever he wished. When it rained, Kay remained dry. And so on.

The mythical similarity between Kai's and Cuchulainn's superhuman abilities probably led Zofia Kossak-Szczucka to confuse the two heroes – hence, presumably, the nonsensical revelation in **The Crusaders** that 'the good cupbearer Keus' defeated 'the fiery monster Cuchulainn' in battle. Such a version is sacrilegious and offensive to the Irish, who know full well that Cuchulainn fell in battle against Queen Medb's army from Connacht, in the spirit of *'nec Hercules contra plures*'. To attribute his death to Kai is

It's a bit like claiming that Skuba the cobbler reported 'the monster Siegfried' (the one from *the Nibelungen*) at Wawel.

The seneschal's manners (according to legend and *fantasy* literature) left much to be desired. We have just read how he treated Gareth and Breunor. In **The Mists of Avalon**, Marion Zimmer Bradley portrays Kai as a gloomy and spiteful character, and Terence H. White does not portray him as the most pleasant of Arthur's childhood companions either. We also recall (from Chrétien and Kossak-Szczucka) that he once publicly slapped a lady across the face – and that is sheer rudeness squared. It's just as well he got a thrashing from Perceval for it. In a joust, Perceval knocked Kai off his horse with such force that he broke his bones. Kai, incidentally, was no skilled knight. We know from Malory that whenever he tried his hand at combat, he would often be thrown over the horse's hindquarters and land with a thud on the ground. He was more effective as an adviser – Arthur valued his foster brother's counsel and followed it.

Kai fell at Camlann, fighting alongside Arthur. Another, and interesting, version can be found in Parke Godwin's **The Beloved Exile**: Kai dies much earlier, at the Battle of Badon, whilst his son Emrys, Prince of Glevum (Gloucester), throws himself into the fray after Camlann to claim Arthur's legacy – that is, power over Britain.

Bedivere

The knight Bedivere (Bedwyr in Wales) appears in the myth from the very beginning, in all versions. Like Kai, discussed above, Bedwyr is mentioned as one of those who fought the giant Yspadden and the boar Trwch Trwyth. Geoffrey of Monmouth lists him as one of Arthur's closest companions, a participant in the Battle of Badon. Bedivere remains at the king's side until the very end – until the tragic conclusion on the fields of Camlann. Of the multitude of knights at Camlann (according to Malory), only two of Arthur's companions survived – the brothers Bedivere and Lukan. Lukan was seriously wounded, so it is Bedivere who stands

as the executor of the king's last will – he casts the sword Excalibur into the waves and watches as the Lady of the Lake's hand grasps the magical weapon and hides it beneath the water. When, having completed his mission, Bedivere returns to the dying king, all he can see on the horizon is the sail of the boat carrying Arthur towards the Isle of Avalon...

Bedwyr ap Bleddyn is one of the narrators *in *Arthur**, the final instalment of Stephen R. Lawhead's Pendragon trilogy. His subsequent fate (after Camlann) is, however, recounted by Parke Godwin in **The Beloved Exile**.

Tristan

> *Gentle lords, would you care to hear a beautiful tale of love and death? It is the story of Tristan and Queen Isolde. Listen to how, in great joy and in great sorrow, they loved one another, and later died on the very same day—he for her sake, she for his.*
>
> Bédier in Boy's translation

Although in the earliest Welsh versions he is listed amongst Arthur's knights as Trystan ap Tallwch, and in Malory's account he appears as Tristram and is called the finest knight of the Round Table after Lancelot, Tristan has survived to our times as the hero of a separate and independent legend about a knight's love for the beautiful Isolde of the Golden Hair, a legend brought to our attention (based on the works of the Breton troubadours – Thomas of Brittany and Béroul) by Joseph Bédier and Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński's translation. Chrétien de Troyes, Le Chevre and Robert de Beauvais also wrote about Tristan, as did Gottfried of Strasbourg, Marie de France and Eilhart von Oberge. Spenser, Boiardo and Ariosto all alluded to him. Richard Wagner dedicated a magnificent musical drama to Tristan and Isolde.

All the Tristans – including this Cornish-Welsh one – are, however, preceded by Drustan, son of Tallorc, whom some consider to be the historical king… of the Picts of Southern Caledonia. But were the actual romantic troubles of the Pi-

It is not known whether the story of the Celtic Drustan formed the basis for numerous Celtic romances about a knight seducing the king's wife.

The Breton versions trace Tristan's origins to the mythical land of Lyonesse (Léonois, Lyones), which was swallowed up by the waves. The Scilly Isles of today are said to be the remnants of Lyonesse. All subsequent authors uphold this version – only Boy Żeleński, in his translation, somewhat obscures the hero's place of birth. In Boy's version, Isolde's lover is Tristan of Lonia.

The story of the Celtic Tristan and Isolde (Drustan and Esseillt) is beautifully recounted by Diana Paxson in her book **The White Raven**. And the ruins of Tintagel Castle can be seen in Cornwall, not far from the town of the same name.

In **Le Morte...**, Tristan is the protagonist of several books. He is one of Arthur's valiantest knights, ranking second only to Lancelot in the chivalric hierarchy (*see*). But Tristan is an unusual knight, very different from his fellow knights of the Round Table. He is not merely a warrior, but also a well-read polyglot, a lover and connoisseur of poetry, an excellent chess player, and, moreover, a harp virtuoso and a bard with a captivating voice. A precursor to the Renaissance man?

Malory's account lacks the poetic and tear-jerking tale of the black sails and Tristan's death on his deathbed, which I myself used in the short story **Maladie**. In **Le Morte*... Tristan meets a grim end – he is killed by a treacherous stab in the back, dealt by his own uncle, King Mark. At the very moment of this crime, Tristan was busy enchanting Isolde with his harp-playing. A good defence lawyer might therefore have defended Mark by suggesting he acted in the heat of the moment – but we know that it was sheer villainy and a premeditated crime long in the making.

The heartbroken Goldilocks died at Tristan's grave. Classic.

Morholt

This character, familiar to us from Boy's legend of Tristan and Isolde, also appears in Arthurian mythology. Mor-

holt (Morold, Morhaus, Moraunt) was a knight of the Round Table hailing from Ireland. He was one of the masters of chivalric combat – in one tale, he effortlessly knocked Gawain and Uwein from their horses with a single blow of his lance.

Morholt was both the brother-in-law and champion of the Irish king Angwisans. In this capacity, he travelled to Cornwall to collect the tribute owed. There, he was slain in a duel with Tristan in the famous battle on the island. Interestingly, it was precisely thanks to this battle that Tristan was knighted as a Knight of the Round Table! For each chair at the Table was magically inscribed with the name of the knight who had the right to sit upon it. After Morholt's death, his name magically vanished, and Tristan's name appeared in its place.

There is, however, an interesting story associated with the weapon with which Tristan took Morholt's life. It was widely believed that the ceremonial coronation sword of the English kings, known as Curtana, which had once belonged to Edward the Confessor, was in fact the weapon of Isolde's legendary lover. The sword Curtana had a blunt tip – which was explained by the fact that its tip had broken off and become lodged in the skull of the slain Irishman.

And here's another interesting fact. In Welsh, *'marchawg'* is not a name, but a term for a warrior fighting on horseback – precisely the sort of Celtic knight, a royal champion, that Morholt was. But the name Morholt (or, in Polish, Morhołt or Marchołt) has become forever intertwined with the legend, and nothing can change that now. I (in the story **Maladie**) didn't try either.

Lamorak

He was the son of King Pellinor and the brother of Perceval. He was a knight in every sense of the word – in Malory's ranking of knights, he takes third place after Lancelot and Tristan. He was also a handsome devil – he caught the eye of a certain beautiful widow – Morgause, Queen of Lothian and the Orkney Islands. A widow who, as we recall, was 'beautiful'

and 'plump', must have been a tad older than Lamorak at the time, but that did not prevent the knight from falling deeply in love with her – a love that was by no means platonic.

This relationship aroused the fury of Morgause's sons – the famous brothers from the Orkney Islands. Gawain, Agravain, Gaheris and Mordred, though accustomed to their mother's erotic excesses, could not forgive her for Lamorak. Firstly, Morgause flaunted herself and caused a scandal. Secondly, Lamorak was, after all, the son of Pellinor, the murderer of Lot, whom Gawain had slain…

What happened tells us a great deal about the chivalric ideals and morality of the era in which *the Vulgate* and **Le Morte D'Arthur** were written. One night, whilst Morgause and Lamorak were 'making love', Gaheris burst into the bedroom and, accompanied by vile insults, murdered his naked mother with a single blow of his sword. To the naked Lamorak, however, he shouted that he would not kill him, for it is unbecoming of a knight to strike down a knight who is naked. 'I shall wait,' he bellowed, 'until you have donned your armour!' And he left.

And indeed he did wait. A few days later, he ambushed Lamorak together with his brothers – Gawain, Agravain and Mordred (Garet did not take part in this). The four of them attacked Lamorak and treacherously slew him. Of course, Lamorak was wearing his armour at the time, so this murder bore the hallmarks of chivalrous combat.

Honi soit qui mal y pense?

Tor

This character deserves attention. Tor was the eldest son of King Pellinor, brother to Agloval, Dornard, Perceval and the aforementioned Lamorak. He was their half-brother. For King Pellinor had fathered Tor with a commoner – the wife of Aries, a cowherd.

Tor grew up in Aries's cottage, but he was no good at herding cattle. However, when it came to horse riding or javelin throwing, or when someone needed a good thrashing… ho, ho. The shrewd peasant Aries, with his wit—

so he realised that something was amiss. Tor was too different from his other sons for Aries to be certain of his wife's fidelity. So he gave his wife a thorough thrashing (unlike kings, amongst the peasantry, both then and now, such matters were dealt with swiftly and without fuss), and took Tor to Camelot. 'Take this oddball, O King,' he said to Arthur, 'for it seems to me that he is yours, not mine. And if I ever catch another knight near my cottage, I'll tear his legs right off his arse.'

Arthur accepted the young man, for it was plain from his very bearing and countenance that he was, in fact, flesh and blood of a knight's flesh and blood. Soon the cat was out of the bag – King Pellinor recognised his son, recalling that he had indeed, in his youth, once robbed a certain shepherdess of her wreath. Tor became a Knight of the Round Table and performed many heroic deeds. He met his end – along with his half-brother Agloval – in the massacre carried out by Lancelot and his kinsmen whilst rescuing Guinevere from *the auto-da-fé*.

In Malory's day, it was rather unthinkable that a knight with a bastard's bar in his coat of arms – especially one of such ignoble maternal descent – should be counted amongst the king's inner circle. The character of Tor alludes to Celtic democracy – the historical Arthur would surely have cared little for the propriety of one's lineage – the only thing that mattered was whether a warrior was effective in defeating the Saxons and Picts.

Bors, Lionel and Ector de Maris

Close relatives of Lancelot of the Lake (*see* the family tree of the kings of Benwick and Ganis). All were valiant and honourable knights of the Round Table.

Ector de Maris was Lancelot's half-brother, the illegitimate son of King Ban of Benwick and the lovely daughter of King Arawaden de Maris. This is how it came about: during a feast at Arawaden's castle, Merlin noticed how the host's daughter was looking at Ban, her face aglow, and how Ban's eyes were shining. Merlin was a kind-hearted wizard who readily used his magical powers to help others, so he arranged for the princess to come to Ban's bedchamber that night

Ban's bed, and 'the two of them had a lovely time together'. From this 'affair', Ector was born. A bastard – like Tor, whom we discussed a moment ago – but a little better: of royal blood on both his father's and mother's sides.

Lancelot's most famous relative, however, was Bors (Bohors, Bohort) of Ganis, the (legitimate) son of King Bors, one of the Grail-seekers, the one who returned to Camelot with the news of the deaths of Galahad and Perceval. In the legend, Bors proved himself worthy of the Grail, for he was a knight of exceptional virtue. Let the event I am about to recount (following *the Vulgate*) bear witness to this – all the more willingly as it amused me immensely.

During his quest for the Grail, Bors came upon the castle of a beautiful lady and spent the night there. In the middle of the night, someone roused him – it was the lady of the house, clad in nothing but a nightgown. 'Make room for me,' said the beauty, 'so that I may lie down beside you.' 'I'd gladly give you the whole bed, my lady,' replied Bors politely. The beauty calmly explained that this was not what she meant. Instead, she invoked the code of chivalry, according to which no good knight dares refuse a woman in need. "And I," she added, slipping off her chemise, "am in great need. To put it simply, I need something. Guess what."

Bors tried to escape from the bed, but the 'needy' girl grabbed him by his shirt and continued to kiss him. So Bors overpowered her and held her firmly, and the girl calmed down noticeably. However, as soon as his grip loosened, she attacked him again. Bors lost his temper and threatened to draw his sword and cut off her head. It did no good. The good knight Bors then realised that this was no tournament, that only escape could save him. And he fled all the way to the top of the tower, but even there the woman caught up with him, this time accompanied by a retinue of twelve maidens. 'If you do not please our lady beautifully and conscientiously,' the maidens shrieked, 'we shall leap to our deaths from this tower, one after the other! Choose, wicked knight, which you prefer: virtue or our death!' 'I pity you,' replied Bors solemnly, 'but I shall not break my vow of chastity.' At these words, the maidens, having called the knight an unseemly name, threw themselves from the tower into the abyss. Bors crossed himself,

and then everything vanished suddenly – the maidens, the castle, the tower... And the good knight Bors realised that they were not maidens, but devils, seductive succubi.

Bors broke his vow of chastity only once in his life – with the daughter of King Brandegoris. From this union was born his only son, Helin the White (*Le Blank*), a valiant young knight who brought no shame upon his famous father.

In the legend's finale, all his kinsmen side with Lancelot when the scandal involving Guinevere erupts and things heat up – both figuratively and literally, for the fire beneath the queen's pyre is already crackling merrily and singeing the unfortunate woman's boots. Ector de Maris, Bors and his brother Lionel take part in the rescue of the condemned woman, standing by Lancelot throughout the ensuing 'Trojan War' with Arthur and Gawain. But when news of Mordred's revolt reaches them, they immediately set out to come to Arthur's aid. Although they arrive too late, they rout the remnants of the rebels and their Saxon allies. Lionel is killed in these battles. Ector de Maris, Bors and the cousins Blamor and Bleoberis, however, seeing that Camelot and the Round Table had ceased to exist, set out for the Holy Land to fight the Saracens. They all perished there, as befits honourable knights, on Good Friday, without having tasted the Easter meal.

*Balin*and Balan

We have already got to know Balin, known as 'the Wild One', a little – and not in the best light. It was he who brutally murdered Lile, the Lady of the Lake; and before that, before becoming a Knight of the Round Table, he had been imprisoned in Arthur's dungeon – for murder. As you can see, becoming a Knight of the Round Table was easier than obtaining a firearms licence today.

After Lile's murder and his banishment from Camelot, Balin wandered the land and ended up at the castle of King Pellam the Rich Fisherman, Pelles's father. In the midst of a brawl that broke out, he struck the king with a spear. As luck would have it – it was nothing less than a holy relic – the spear of the Roman centurion Longinus, the very one from Golgotha... The wound it inflicted on the eye—

his wound became incurable. Pellam became the Maimed Fisher King. As we already know, it was only his great-grandson, Galahad the Grail-Bearer, who healed him.

In the German versions (including Wagner's operas), we encounter an almost identical version – except that King Pellam the Fisherman becomes King Amfortas, Balian becomes the evil sorcerer Klingschor, and Galahad becomes Parzival. The Fisher King's wound has symbolic significance and alludes to Celtic beliefs – the maimed king is incapable of sexual intercourse, and the Earth over which he reigns cannot be fertilised. If the king is not healed, the Earth will die, turning into *La Terre Gaste*, the Barren Earth. The wounding spear is a phallic symbol, whilst the healing Grail represents *the vulva*.

Let us return, however, to our homicidal maniac, Balina, a character so unsympathetic that he scarcely deserves such a prominent role in the legend. Fortunately, his story is drawing to a close, and justice will be served. Following his encounter with Pellam, Balina was pursued by his own brother, Balan. In the ensuing fight, the brothers killed one another, and Merlin buried them in a shared grave.

Marion Zimmer Bradley presents an interesting take on the brothers' story in **The Mists of Avalon**. Here, the matter is more complicated. Balan is the biological son of Vivien, the venerable Lady of the Lake, but he is raised in Balin's family – he is therefore his foster brother (the custom *of altram*). Balin kills Vivien in revenge for an act of euthanasia carried out by the druidess on her own suffering, terminally ill mother. Balan, who accepts euthanasia and is grateful to his birth mother for sparing his foster mother's suffering, takes revenge on Vivien – he kills Balin, but perishes himself in the process.

Uwain

Son of King Uriens of Rheged, known in Welsh legends as Owein. The hero of two branches *of the Mabinogion*: *The Dream of Rhonabwy* and *Owein and the Lady of the Fountain*.

In *the Vulgate* he appears as Ivein the Great; in Malory's work

known as Uwain. Owing to his kinship with the traitor Akkolon, Morgana's lover, he is banished from Camelot for a time, though he had nothing to do with his stepmother's plot; on the contrary, he foiled her assassination attempt on Uriens, whom Morgana had also sought to kill.

In Chrétien de Troyes's work he is Yvein, and in Hartmann von Aue's, Ivein. He even found his way into *the chansons de geste* – there is also an Iven amongst Charlemagne's paladins.

He is also known by the epithet 'Knight of the Lion' – for he once saved this animal from the dragon's claws, and the lion, having been spared from death, faithfully accompanied the knight thereafter.

Uwain was a highly specialised knight – his craft lay in freeing and rescuing beautiful damsels from trouble. According to legend, he rescued over three hundred of them. Uwain married one of the women he had rescued, a widow (whose husband had been murdered), and that is when the trouble began. The widow, named Laudine (the Lady of the Fountain), viewed Uwain's expeditions and knightly *quests* with a wary eye, rightly suspecting that one of the damsels he rescued might seem more attractive to her husband than his lawful wife. On one occasion, she declared that if Uwain did not return exactly one year after setting off on his knightly wanderings, she would cast him out. The knight was late. Slightly. By two years. Laudine kept her word. It took a long, long time before Uwain won back her favour. But he did. They lived happily ever after.

Malory completely omits the above Welsh-French-German version of the events and fate of King Uriens's son. There is not a word about Laudine or the fountain; even the adventure with the lion is , in **Le Morte**… the lot of Perceval, not Uwain. From Malory (and from *the Vulgate*), however, we know the circumstances of the knight's death. Whilst searching for the Grail, Uwain fought a senseless battle with Gawain (the two knights did not recognise one another), was gravely wounded by a lance and died in a nearby hermitage. This killing definitively excluded Gawain from the ranks of those worthy of beholding the Grail.

Geraint

Prince of Dyfneint (Devon). In the works of Chrétien de Troyes and Hartmann von Aue, he appears as Erec. Marie de France, in her *lais* (Breton ballads), calls him Graelen-tem. And one of King Charles's paladins is named Gerin.

According to *the* so-called *Black Book of Caermarthen*, a 12th-century collection of Welsh ballads, Geraint (Gereint) ap Erbin fell in battle against the Saxons, specifically in the ninth of the twelve battles fought by Arthur and recorded by Nennius. If so, Geraint did not live to see the final triumph at Badon or the heyday of Camelot and the Round Table.

He does not appear at all in Malory's work. In *the *Mabinogion**, however, he is the hero of a branch entitled **Gereint and Enid**, which is virtually identical to the romance by Chrétien de Troyes and Hartmann's poem. In this tale, Geraint wins the heart and hand of the fair maiden Enid, but suddenly begins to suspect her – quite without foundation – of infidelity. The reason for this is that he overhears Enid complaining that her husband never sets out on any quests, that he has forgotten his duties as a knight, and that he is valiant and spirited – to the point of excess – only in the bedchamber. As we can see, Enid resents Geraint for something completely opposite to what Laudine resents Uwain for.

Offended, Geraint therefore decides to set out on a knightly quest – together with his wife. He orders Enid to dress in the worst, tattered garments and ride ahead of him. He forbids her from speaking a single word to him. He himself remains silent, sulking. Enid is in despair.

Riding at the head of the party, Enid keeps coming across rogue knights who harbour ill intentions towards her husband. So she warns Geraint; Geraint dispatches the attackers… and then harshly rebukes Enid for breaking her vow of silence, thereby exacerbating the marital conflict. But in the end, all ends well – love is restored, Geraint and Enid reconcile, return to Arthur's court, and live happily ever after as an exemplary couple.

It cannot be ruled out that it was Geraint himself, reimagined in later Norman and Franconian versions—

(*Li Loheren Gerin, Gerin Le Lorraine*) provided the inspiration for the character of Lohengrin, the Swan Knight.

Pelleas and Ettard

Pelleas of the Islands was madly in love with the beautiful maiden Ettard. He won tournaments for her, gave her gifts, pleaded, wept, and confessed his love on bended knee – all to no avail. Ettard was as hard as a rock. Not only that – she constantly sent knights to duel with Pelleas, who was lurking around her castle. Just to catch a glimpse of her, Pelleas – though he was a master of the lance – allowed himself to be defeated and taken to the castle in chains. The wickedly capricious Ettard humiliated him in every way she could – she even ordered him to be tied to a horse's tail and paraded about to the general amusement.

One day, Gawain appeared in the area. He listened to Pelleas's lamentations and offered to take his armour and present himself before Ettard, declaring that he had just slain the knight who was in love with her. This little lie was meant to soften the heart of the cold-hearted woman.

No sooner said than done. Gawain took Pelleas's armour and presented himself before Ettard's tent. Ettard listened dispassionately to the account of her rival's death, looked at the tall and handsome Gawain… and flashed a smile. After less than a minute's chat, they both entered the tent, where Ettard (in accordance with Malory's text) allowed Gawain 'to satisfy all his desires'. Gawain, a true son of Lot of the Orkneys, satisfied his own desires and Ettard's for two nights and two days.

On the third day, Pelleas could bear it no longer and came to see what was happening. He peered into the tent and was stunned. He realised that in matters of the heart, one should not ask one's friends for help. Before he rode off, he laid his naked sword upon the sleeping, exhausted lovers.

Gawain and Ettard finally awoke and saw the sword. Ettard began to weep, whilst Gawain remembered that he was in a great hurry.

Pelleas wandered through the forest, howling, until he met the sorceress Nimue. Nimue was just returning from visiting the imprisoned

Merlin, whom she would visit from time to time to ensure the wizard didn't get too bored in his confinement. She listened to Pelleas's complaints, gave him a sidelong glance and asked: 'What does this Ettard have that I don't?' The knight looked more closely and was forced to admit that she had nothing, and who knows, perhaps quite the opposite. After a brief and casual conversation, they both 'satisfied each other's desires' so thoroughly that they decided to do it more often. In fact, on a regular basis. Pelleas was forced to abandon his duties as a Knight of the Round Table, for Nimue – the Lady of the Lake – did not wish her lover to risk his health and life or waste his time on trifles, instead of devoting himself to satisfying her desires. Pelleas – as *Le Morte* tells *us*… lived alongside the sorceress like a king for the rest of his days, enjoying leisure, food, drink and the delights of the bed.

And Ettard? When she learnt of this, she despaired, her health failed, and she died in tears. Girls, beware the fate of Ettard.

Sagramor

A knight by this name appears frequently in Malory and in *the Vulgate*. He is not particularly remarkable, and I would have overlooked him were it not for the epithet he bears. He is, namely, called… Sagramor the Lustful (*Le Desirous*).

How the knight came by this honourable title is unknown. Not a word is said about it. Damn it all. Lot of the Orkneys causes all sorts of trouble, as they say, yet he has no nickname. Gawain, his son, satisfies the desires of various damsels day and night – and no one bestows upon him some fitting *nom de guerre* (or rather, *d'amour*). Yet Sagramor is the Lecher. One can therefore well imagine his exploits in the bedchamber – surely comparable to Arthur's feats of war at Badon (nine hundred men!).

Oh dear, Sir Thomas, that's not on, my Cistercian brothers. To show off such a cannon and not let it fire even once? That's not how it's done.

According to *the Vulgate*, Sagramor the Lecher died a hero's death in battle against the Saxons allied with Mordred.

Turquin and other ruffians

The vile renegade knight Turquin, from the top of his keep, kept a watchful eye out for any good knights approaching. Whenever he spotted one, he would attack, defeat, rob, torture and throw him into the dungeon. He was no pushover – he effortlessly defeated and imprisoned thirty-four knights in the dungeon – including Lionel, Hector de Maris, Kai, Brandiles, Galihud (not to be confused with Galahad!), Aliduk, Brian of the Isles, and even Morholt, one of the top ten. But at last, the axe struck a rock – Turquin took on Lancelot of the Lake.

Even Lancelot did not have it easy – after shattering his lance and bringing both horses to the ground, the hand-to-hand sword fight lasted over two hours, and Lancelot was bleeding from numerous wounds. At last, however, Turquin faltered, and Lancelot shattered his helmet with a mighty blow. Turquin collapsed to his knees, and Lancelot's next blow severed his head.

Turquin, as well as the other villains (Breunis the Merciless, Colgrevauns of Gore, the rapist of maidens known as Peris of the Wild Forest, Carados, the Vulture of Maupas, the Knight of the Black Land, the Green Knight, the Red Knight, Persant of Inde and others) are, of course, a necessary part of the plot – who would the 'good guys' fight if there were no 'bad guys'? Yet these villains also faithfully reflect the true, historical nature of chivalry and the chivalric era. For there were incomparably more Turquins and raubritters than Lancelots and Galahads.

Meleagant

Another scoundrel. He was a prince – the son of Bagdemagus, King of Gore, and cousin to King Uriens. He secretly coveted Queen Guinevere and was consumed by wicked lust. When Guinevere went into the forest with her retinue to celebrate Beltane, Meleagant abducted her, imprisoned her and intended to enslave her. *A* classic Irish *'aithed'* – the abduction of a woman.

Lancelot freed the queen (arriving in a cart!) and spared the wicked prince's life. Meleagant repaid him

It turned out beautifully – he galloped off to Arthur and reported that the liberator, Lancelot, had seized the opportunity – before returning the freed queen to her rightful husband, he had 'had a lovely time with her' at Meleagant's castle, never leaving the queen's bed, neither by day nor by night. Which, incidentally, was absolutely true.

The matter could therefore have had serious consequences for Guinevere and Lancelot, but, fortunately, there was, after all, a code of chivalry and chivalrous custom. 'You lie, you son of a bitch,' Lancelot said coldly to Meleagant, 'and I shall prove it at once in single combat.' In the duel that ensued, Lancelot, the unrivalled master of the jousting field, split the weaker Meleagant's head in two. By this act, he proved beyond doubt that right and truth were on his side, that the deceased had lied, and that Guinevere was as pure as a lily.

The episode with Meleagant is also a reference to Celtic mythology – it is another triad, whereby in the Lancelot–Guinevere–Meleagant configuration, Lancelot is the old king whose prowess is challenged – unsuccessfully – by a young pretender. In earlier Welsh legends, which served as the prototype for the above story, Queen Gwenhwyfar's abductor was an evil giant, and her liberator – and the slayer of the pretender – was King Arthur himself.

Palomides

An interesting knight – because he is from overseas. He is a Saracen, a pagan. How is that possible, one might ask, a Saracen, an infidel, a follower of Muhammad, amongst Christian knights? Amongst the elite and the cream of chivalry? Seated at the same (round) table as Galahad, Perceval and Bors? A Saracen, bearing the title 'Sir' like all the other knights, whose holiest commandment and duty is, after all, the defence of the faith? Hey, something's not quite right here!

It does. In devising the character of Palomides, Thomas Malory probably drew on the French romances about the knights of Charles the Hammer, who heroically repelled Arab aggression in the 8th century, and on *the chansons de geste*—the songs about the paladins of Charlemagne, who waged war in the 9th century —

in battles against the Moors of the Emir of Córdoba. In chivalric romances, Saracens and Moors are usually portrayed as a collective villain: a savage horde thirsting for Christian blood. Occasionally, however, they are depicted as individuals – and in such cases they are treated as equal and worthy adversaries. Just like knights – with all the trimmings, that is, the code and rules of chivalric combat. There is a historical basis for this – Muhammad's warriors, especially the Spanish Moors, often modelled themselves on the giaur knights, adopting some of their attributes – clothing, armour, weapons, and also their code of honour. The situation was similar during the Crusades. Saladin set many examples of chivalrous behaviour; he was treated as a knight by the Crusaders and admired by them.

Malory, therefore, had plenty to draw upon when creating the character of Sir Palomides. However, if one were to attempt to fit this Muslim Knight of the Round Table into the actual historical timeline, the result would be a monstrous, terrifying and breathtaking piece of nonsense. For Muhammad was born in the year 571, in Mecca. He proclaimed himself the Prophet of Allah in the year 611. The so-called Hijra (Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina) took place in the year 622. For Muslims, this is the year zero; it marks the beginning of the development of Islam and its expansion, that is, jihad. So, portraying a Knight of the Round Table (515–540) as a follower of Islam is just as comical as placing a bishop with a cross on the walls of Troy.

Well, but legends have a life of their own, and the Saracen knight Palomides is a figure in Arthurian legend interesting enough to warrant a few words.

We first meet Palomides in Ireland, at the court of King Angwisans, when Tristan arrives there. The Saracen is in love with Isolde, and a rivalry between him and Tristan begins immediately. At a tournament organised by the King of Ireland, Tristan and Palomides face each other in combat. The Saracen is a brave and skilled warrior, but he is defeated by the man second only to Lancelot. Tristan forces the defeated and vanquished Palomides to enter into a knightly oath: Palomides must renounce Isolde and swear never to approach her

and will no longer pester her with his advances. That he will forget her for ever.

From that day on, Tristan and Palomides are bound by a strange bond – a mixture of hostility, envy, hatred, admiration… and friendship. Sometimes the two knights fight one against the other; at other times, one helps the other and saves his life. They even find themselves imprisoned together in a dungeon, treacherously held captive by some 'evil knight' – and they support one another faithfully and in solidarity in their misery.

Saracen, however, fails to keep his promise and continues to actively adore Isolde. This is, of course, another Celtic triad – a love triangle in which, this time, Tristan plays the role of the old king and Palomides that of the suitor. At one point, Palomides even goes so far as to carry out *a* classic *aithed* – he abducts Isolde (just as Meleagant did, as described above). But Tristan (like Lancelot) is still the Knight of Summer; his vitality and erotic power are beyond question. Tristan effortlessly reclaims his Goddess from the suitor. Interestingly, there is no armed confrontation – Tristan reaches for his harp, not his sword. Enchanted by his playing and singing, Isolde falls into a trance-like state of rapture, and Palomides realises he has lost. Isolde is and will remain Tristan's – the Saracen stands no chance.

But the rivalry continues. On several occasions, the two knights set a date for a duel to the death, but something always gets in the way. Tristan, seeing Palomides' undying love for Isolde, accuses him of insincere and treacherous behaviour, to which the Saracen replies (quoting Malory in my translation) as follows:

'Do not call me a traitor, for I am none. To love is every man's right. You love La Beale Isoud and I love her. You have won her favour, her heart—

* In **Le Morte Darthur**, people are constantly being thrown into the dungeon, or ending up in prison as a result of treachery, and so on. Let us not forget that Sir Thomas Malory, whilst writing his work, was himself behind bars. Apologists have repeatedly tried to excuse the author on the grounds of the violent times in which he lived. Historians, however, have unearthed the written text of the judgement, which leaves no room for doubt: Sir Thomas was imprisoned for armed assault, murder and the rape of a woman.

and her bed. I have not won them, nor shall I ever win them, but I shall not cease to love her until the end of my days – just as, after all, you too shall not cease to love her'.

Finally, they both decide: 'Whether God or the devil brought us together, we must part!' A fierce and protracted duel ensues...

But more on that in a moment.

The Barking Beast

The Saracen Palomides was a valiant and honourable knight, famous and held in high esteem, but he still refused to convert to the Christian faith, remaining a pagan. Once, a fight broke out in which Palomides defeated and killed another Saracen, and as the vanquished man breathed his last, a terrible stench spread all around, as if someone had, without hesitation, dug up an outhouse or a three-week-old grave – so foully did the Turk's soul stink. Those present at the event marvelled as to why Palomides refused to be baptised. 'Are you not afraid,' they asked, 'that you too will smell like that after death?' 'I assure you,' replied Palomides, 'that I shall die a Christian no worse than yourselves. Yet I shall not be baptised until I have caught the Questing Beast.'

This 'Barking Beast' (Questing Beast) is one of the more enigmatic figures in **Le Morte Darthur**. King Arthur spotted the monster in the forest – it was a hideous beast: it had the head of a serpent, the body of a leopard, the hindquarters of a lion, and the legs of a stag. When the creature moved, it emitted sounds from its belly that sounded as though thirty dogs were barking twice over whilst chasing game – hence the name, for in English the word *'quest'* refers not only to a knight's quest but also to the barking of hounds – the howling of hounds that have gone into the forest.

King Pellinor, Perceval's father, spent half his life chasing the Beast. When Pellinor met his end, slain by Gawain, Palomides set out on the monster's trail. It is impossible to fathom what this is all about – the Beast does nothing but roam the woods and bark

with the voice of sixty mongrels. Nothing else. It neither abducts maidens, nor devours anyone, nor even defiles a well. Nothing. It just walks about and barks. So why do Pellinor, and after him Palomides, chase after the monster like maniacs?

The text mentions some sort of prophecy by Merlin concerning the Beast and whoever captures it, but it is unclear what this is all about. A complete enigma.

There seem to be two possible explanations: either Caxton lost some explanatory pages from Malory's manuscript, or Malory deliberately omitted these explanations because… he wanted to mock chivalry and chivalric vows, and the pursuit of incomprehensible, senseless ideals.

But let us return to Palomides and his deadly duel with Tristan. The battle between the rivals was long, fierce and bloody. At last, the exhausted Saracen falls, but Tristan does not deliver the fatal blow. The two knights vow to each other their faithful friendship. They make their way to the nearest chapel, for Palomides – though he has not captured the monster – nevertheless decides to be baptised and convert to the Christian faith. After the ceremony, in which he acts as godfather, Tristan rides off to Camelot. Palomides, meanwhile, sets off in pursuit of the Barking Beast...

In the finale of the legend, Palomides and his brother Safer side with Lancelot in the War of Guinevere. When Lancelot returns to France, he appoints the converted Saracen as Duke of Provence. We hear no more of Palomides.

Nor do we hear anything more about the Barking Beast.

*Knightly*rankings

The sheer number of battles fought in the legend – both in tournaments and in actual combat – allows us to compile *a top ten* list of the best at unseating an opponent from their horse with a lance or a sword.

The first three champions (in the order of their podium positions) were Lancelot of the Lake, Tristan of Lyonesse and Lamorak, son of Pellinor. They were unrivalled – and when

Whenever they faced each other – which happened from time to time – the fight was usually inconclusive. In one such encounter, Tristan and Lamorak fought on horseback and on foot for a full four hours, to no avail. Finally, Lamorak, full of admiration for his opponent's skill, honourably agreed to admit defeat. The noble Tristan did not accept the offer, declaring that Lamorak was the victor. Lamorak disagreed with this assertion, and so on.

Once, however, both were struck down – with a single lance – by the Saracen Palomides, proving that a list of the best does not settle the matter. Nevertheless, no one ever managed to defeat Lancelot in a fair fight. The exception was Galahad, his son – though Galahad was an exception in every respect. His victory over Lancelot (and Perceval) is symbolic in nature.

Although, as has been said, the list was fluid, the subsequent places (in order, from fourth to tenth) are occupied by: Bors of Ganis, the Saracen Palomides, Perceval of Wales, Morholt of Ireland, Pelleas of the Isles, Garet of the Orkneys and his brother Gawain.

The top ten must have had to prove their chivalrous prowess very frequently, as there was no shortage of challengers. The ranked positions on the list were also the subject of envy – when, at one point, Tristan's numerous victories began to overshadow Lancelot's fame, Ector de Maris and Lionel intended to kill the knight from Lyonesse, a plan to which the noble Lancelot firmly objected.

At tournaments, however, some knights were reluctant to face the champions, not wishing to suffer the humiliation of an almost certain defeat in front of the public. A fashion therefore took hold amongst the champions of competing incognito, swapping shields, and so on. At one tournament, Lancelot even disguised himself… as a girl.

Of the entire group of ten, only Morholt and Gawain met their deaths in a fair, chivalrous duel. Garet was killed in the confusion and chaotic melee that broke out whilst rescuing Guinevere from the pyre. He was not wearing his armour at the time. Tristan and Lamorak were killed by a blow to the back, whilst Lancelot and Perceval died of natural causes.

Bors of Ganis perished in the Holy Land, presumably in battle against the superior forces of the pagans. Pelleas had retired – protected from danger and misfortune by the sorceress Nimue, who was in love with him. We know nothing of Palomides's fate. Perhaps he was devoured by the Barking Beast?

Øgierthe Dane

He was one of Charlemagne's famous paladins. It would therefore seem that his place is in *the chansons de geste*, rather than amongst the heroes of the legend of the Round Table. But that is not quite the case.

Ogier the Dane, a hero of numerous valiant battles against the Saracens, was once on a sea voyage. The ship was wrecked, and the paladin, much like Robinson Crusoe, was cast ashore. The area in which he found himself seemed wild and desolate; all the greater, then, was Ogier's astonishment when a woman of exquisite beauty suddenly appeared before him, with a figure worthy of the Graces, scantily clad in a diaphanous robe. The beauty greeted the paladin with kind words, then placed a wreath of flowers upon his head. From that moment on, Ogier was lost to the world. For the wreath was enchanted, and the woman was… the sorceress Morgana.

For two hundred years – no more and no less – Morgana kept the enchanted knight in the thrall of love, and the knight did not complain in the slightest. But one day the magical wreath fell off by accident, and the enchanted Ogier regained his memory. 'Jesus Mary,' he stammered. 'King Charles… the Saracens… What on earth am I doing here?'

Morgana's weeping and wailing were of no avail. The knight returned to the real world. He was slightly surprised to find that Hugon Capet was now ruling in Charles's place, but as the Saracens still threatened the kingdom, paladins were still in high demand. Ogier fought long and bravely. Hugh Capet died, and Ogier, now a man of great renown, even began to contemplate marrying his widow… He was just about to propose when suddenly Morgana appeared, furious as hell. Without a word, she enveloped Ogier in a cloud and carried him off to Avalon.

Legend has it that in Avalon, the Stallion befriended King Arthur over a game of dice and a jug of ale, and that they pass their time pleasantly in the company of the ever-changing Ladies of the Lake. The legend also foretells that when the time comes and Arthur returns to Britain, the Danish Ogier will arrive with him and take his rightful place at the Round Table.

Ogier the Dane found his way (in the 15th century) into Danish folklore and fairy tales as Holger Danske, becoming a folk hero in the struggle for Denmark's freedom, fighting against the Germanic invaders. Hans Christian Andersen brought Holger Danske into modern literature. Andersen's fairy tales feature a motif from the folk legend, which tells of the brave Holger still being alive; like many legendary heroes, he is hidden in underground caves beneath Helsingor Castle, where he waits for the day of great need to come, when he will rise to fight in defence of his country.

In reality – if one can use that word in relation to a legendary figure – the paladin Ogier was by no means Danish. *The 'Le Danois '* or *'De Denemarche '* in his name was most likely a corruption of *'de les Marches*'.

Poul Anderson (himself of Danish descent) made Ogier the hero of his *fantasy* novel **Three Hearts and Three Lions**.

Places and locations

Legendary geographical nomenclature is a devilishly difficult and complicated matter. The best-known version of the myth, the one derived from Malory, is teeming with names – but few of them can be matched to any of the presumed historical locations. Firstly, Malory's version was geographically politicised – Arthur's adventures take place in locations that were as symbolic to the English contemporaries of Sir Thomas as they were utterly implausible, given the actual political geography of Britain in the 5th–6th centuries. London, Westminster, Canterbury or Dover could in no way

was the domain of Arthur and his knights – it lay within the territory of the Saxons*.

The same applies to the land of Logru (Logres, Logris, Leogria) – this is the name given in legend to the whole of Britain, the land ruled by King Arthur. As we recall, this name derives from the mythical Lokrynus, son of Brutus. If we base our understanding on the legend of Brutus, the ancestor of the Britons, the land of Logru should encompass south-east and central England – that is, from Kent to the Chiltern Hills and the mouth of the Humber. Yet this was precisely the territory occupied by the Saxon invaders. Arthur did indeed rule over the Salisbury Plain, Somerset, Devon and Wales, as well as (through allied kings) Cornwall and the North – the land of Rheged as far as Strathclyde and Antonine Wall, the land of Lothian and the territories north of the Humber – Bernicia and Deira.

Malory's other place names, I presume, were distorted in the process of translation from French into the language of fifteenth-century England. The actual region of Gower in Wales, for example (Swansea on the Bristol Channel), appears in **Le Morte*…* as Gore, Gorre, Goris or Strangore. Wales itself is referred to as Gales or Galis. The Orkney Islands, the domain of King Lot, are called Orkania; Tristan's birthplace, Lonia; and so on.

Generally speaking, however, it is not entirely clear what has been distorted, or what the original, authentic names of the places and regions featured in the legend were. Even if we regard Welsh myths and legends as the absolutely original versions, we must not forget that we know these only from written accounts – and it was only

* As for London, most serious *fantasy* authors do, however, lean towards Malory's version – two events important to the legend are set in today's capital of England: the coronation of Uther Pendragon as king and Arthur's drawing of the sword from the stone. Who knows, perhaps the 'fortress of Londinium', situated further east, held out against the Saxons for some time and was one of the centres of British identity? In the epilogue *to **Le Morte Darthur**, however, we read that during Mordred's rebellion, Queen Guinevere fled from the usurper and barricaded herself in the Tower of London – it was there that she received news of the Battle of Camlann and Arthur's death. Nonsense! The Tower was built during the reign of William the Conqueror. Five hundred years later!

These were presumably first written down in the 11th–12th centuries on the basis of oral traditions. Distortions also arose during the process of adaptation. Naturally, it was easier for the Welsh to work with the original material. After all, their mythical nomenclature contained original roots which can still be found on a map of Wales today. A stronghold was and is *a 'caer'*, a mountain is *a 'pen'*, a lake is *a 'llyn'*, a ford is *a 'rhyd'*, an island is *an 'ynys'*, and so on. Hence, for example, *the 'Karboniki'* or *'Karbeneki'* found in the French versions and in Malory's work are clearly Welsh strongholds or castles. As for the knights Dinas, Dinadan and Dodinas, however, it is not certain whether they might not have arisen from a misunderstanding of a geographical name containing the root *'din'* – meaning 'hill'.

The confusion deepens further when *fantasy* authors get involved – and include maps in their books.

At first glance, a map of Arthurian Britain is not difficult to draw up. After all, most historical place-names have Roman origins, and very often the current names are derived directly from Latin names. In many cases, it is a historically confirmed fact that a given settlement was built by the Romans in the middle of nowhere, where there had been no pre-existing British settlement. Londinium, for example, was founded as a port for shipping tin – and remained London. Archaeologists unanimously agree that there was nothing there before the Romans arrived. Trinovantum, Caer Ludd and Caer Lundein are all mythical, invented names.

Other Roman towns and forts, however, were built on the sites of former British settlements – Luguvalium, Venta, Isca, Eburacum, Segontium. Today they are known as Carlisle, Caerwent, Caerleon-on-Usk, York and Caernarfon. But can we be certain that the Britons called them Caer Llial, Caer Went, Caer Llion, Caer Ebrauc and Caer Seint yn Arvon in pre-Roman times? And can we be absolutely certain that, after the Romans left, they immediately reverted to the old names?

Some *fantasy* writers consistently adhere to precisely this latter view – for them, everything is Celtic

– Caer Lundein instead of Londinium, Caer Esk instead of Isca Dumnoniorum, Caer Gloiu instead of Gloucester or Glevum.

Other authors concoct a Molotov cocktail – they mix up the names. The characters travel between Glevum and Caer Wisc, between Caer Lial and Londinium, and journey from Eburacum to Din Eidyn. Devon is sometimes Dyfneint, sometimes Dumnonia. Caer Myrddin (Merlin's mythical abode) appears alternately as Maridunum. Gwynedd is Venedotia, whilst Demetia is called Rheged – or vice versa. Names closely intertwined with legend, however, retain their modern forms: Glastonbury (instead of Ynys Gwydrin), Winchester* (instead of Venta Belgarum), Salisbury (instead of Sarum), Tintagel (instead of the Celtic Din Tagell or the Roman Durocornovium).

Still others add their own twists to this mix – names that are entirely fantastical and made-up. They mark on their maps places and lands significant to the legend, but… with neither a confirmed nor a factual name or location. For example, the location of Badon Hill, the site of the great victory over the Saxons, or the site of Arthur's final battle – Camlann** – is not historically confirmed.

* The roots *'chester'* (cestep) and *'bury'* in English town names are undoubtedly of Germanic origin. They date back to the time when the Saxons established their own settlements on the conquered British lands or renamed the Celtic towns they had captured. Of the same origin are, amongst others, the roots *'shire*', *'town'* (ton), *'burg'* (borough), *'ford'*, *'wood*', *'wich '* and *'ham*'. A place with a name containing such a root could not have been Celtic – that is, Arthurian.

* * There are many versions and hypotheses regarding the locations of both these important battles. None of them convince me, so I have not included either Badon or Camlann on my map. For the sake of accuracy, however, I should note that, in the opinion of most scholars of the myth, Badon (Caer Vaddon) is the present-day Bath, that is, the Roman Aquae Sulis. The Battle of Camlann, on the other hand, is said to have taken place in Cornwall, not far from Tintagel, near the village of Camelford on the River Camel. There is a place here called *Slaughter Bridge*. According to legend, after the famous battle, the River Camel ran red with blood in this area.

And – naturally – everyone marks Camelot on their map. Anyone you ask where King Arthur had his seat will answer without hesitation: 'Where else but at Camelot Castle? It was here that the king held court with his entire court; it was in the throne room of Camelot that the Round Table stood, around which the knights gathered and feasted; it was from here that they set out on dangerous expeditions, and so on.

For many years, it was believed that Camelot stood on the site occupied in Roman times by the fort of Venta Belgarum, and now by the city of Winchester in the county of Hampshire, which had been the capital of Wessex since the 6th century and the seat of the kings of England until the 10th century. It is only relatively recently that a theory has emerged suggesting that the legendary castle stood on Cadbury Hill in Somerset, not far from the village of South Cadbury. There are very plausible traces of a former stronghold there. But there is still no certainty...

It is not known for certain who coined (or adapted) this name, nor is it known what it actually sounded like in Celtic – or in Latin, if Camelot was built on the site of a Roman fortified camp. *Fantasy* authors try hard to make up for this oversight by inventing Celtic names (Caer Cam, Camlan, Caer Camiliot, etc.)

Arthur's second seat was Caer Lleon or Caer Llion (Caerleon on the River Usk, which was the mighty fort of Isca in Roman times and is a town that still exists today). It is Caer Lleon that is referred to as Karduel in *the Vulgate*. There is a theory that this town (apart from the name Isca) was called Urbs Legionum, the City of Legions – it is here, then, that the ninth battle with the Saxons, mentioned by Nennius, might have taken place.

The third seat (according to Chrétien de Troyes) was Cardigan in Wales, situated at the mouth of the River Teifi where it flows into Cardigan Bay.

The large Roman fort of Deva (Chester) and the town of Caerdyv (Cardiff, the present-day capital of Wales) are also considered to have been Arthur's residences.

In Glastonbury, in the county of Somerset, if the legends are to be believed, there was a symbolic centre of British Christianity in Arthur's time. The

to this day, the Benedictine abbey (Glastonbury Abbey), considered the oldest in England, is said to stand on the site of an ancient monastery founded by King Arthur. It was a holy place, for it was in Glastonbury, on Ynys Witrin (the Glass Island), that Joseph of Arimathea planted his staff, which grew into a beautiful hawthorn bush. Interestingly, in Glastonbury, at the foot of the hill known as Glastonbury Tor, a species of hawthorn found nowhere else did indeed grow. It no longer grows there, however, as Cromwell's Puritans uprooted and burnt everything to the ground as part of their campaign against 'Papist superstitions'. Ah, history, history, dark disco…

Queen Guinevere is said to have found refuge and a place of penance at Glastonbury Abbey; Arthur is also said to have been buried here – the tomb of the king and queen was 'discovered' in 1190 on the orders of King Henry II as part of a propaganda campaign designed to strengthen his claim to the crown and authority over Arthur's empire. Indeed, a whole host of paradoxes at once – the false tomb of a supposedly historical king as a pretext for claims to a wholly legendary empire[8].

In folk tradition, Glastonbury Tor was a place of witchcraft. Elves would gather here, ruled by the god Gwyn ap Nudd (against whom the folk saint, Collen, fought). The area around Glastonbury is also sometimes identified with the magical land of Avalon – a view put forward by certain *fantasy* writers, such as Marion Zimmer Bradley and Stephen R. Lawhead.

The locations of other places and regions significant to the myth are shown on maps which I have painstakingly drawn up based on various sources – not excluding *fantasy* literature.

* Many events in the Arthurian legend may have a historical basis. But it is impossible to believe that Arthur conquered and subjugated Gaul, Aquitaine, Ireland, Rome (!), Gotland and Norway (!!!).

Avalon

...uz Avalun, der Feinen Land...

Godfrey of Strasbourg

The mythical Land of the Fairies (Faërie, Land der Feinen), a place of rest and refuge for heroes weary of earthly life. The Land of Eternal Happiness and Youth, identified with Tír nan Og, the Land of Youth, known from Irish mythology, and the Celtic Isle*of the Blest*, the equivalent of the Homeric Elysium and the Isle of*the* Hesperides.

In Welsh mythology, this land is called Ynis Avallon (Ynys yr Afallon), meaning the Island of Apple Trees or the Island of Apples (*aval, afal* means apple). In Edward Burne-Jones's* famous painting, we see King Arthur sleeping in a pavilion surrounded by apple trees. Enchantresses stand around the bed, whilst the waves lapping at the scene indicate that the scene is set on an island.

According to legend, Avalon is sometimes a land far beyond the western sea (like the mythical Hy Brasil), a land submerged beneath the waves (like Lyonesse or Ys), or an island hidden amidst the mists (*the Mists of Avalon*), most often situated near Glastonbury, where the mythical Ynis Witrin (Ynys Gwydrin) – the Glass Island. Legend placed the earliest Christian monastery and chapel on the Glass Island, whilst on the nearby, yet inaccessible to mortals, Ynis Avalon lay the 'pagan' Land of Fairies. This represents a symbolic confrontation between the Old and the New.

* Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898) was one of the most famous painters of the Pre-Raphaelite group, artists who very often sought inspiration for their symbolic and mystical works in Arthurian legend. Scenes from the Arthurian legend were also painted by, amongst others, William Hatherell, James Archer, Charles E. Fripp, Frank Cadogan Cowper, William Frank Calderon and Ferdinand Piloty the Younger, as well as the later Arthur Rackham. The works of the Pre-Raphaelites continue to adorn numerous editions of books devoted to King Arthur to this day.

Avalon was also said to be situated on the islands of Mona (Anglesey) and Manau (Man), which were in fact major centres of the Druidic cult. Many Druidic sanctuaries and ritual sites were located on islands – both at sea and on lakes. This is confirmed by archaeological excavations.

Not far from Anglesey, on the islet of Puffin Island, the prototype of the Castle of the Grail and Mount Montsalvat was also said to have stood – the legendary Caer Sidi, the Whirling Castle, built from human bones.

There was also Avalon as a valley (*The Fair Vale of Avalon*, in Warton's work).

In Teodor Parnicki's*Tylko Beatrycze*(**Only Beatrice**), Avalon – the hiding place of the Grail (and Dante's Purgatory) – is that mountain beyond the ocean which is so crucial to the book's plot.

In Tolkien's work, the elves sail away from Middle-earth across the sea – to Avalon, of course; the analogy is clear. And Jack Vance (the *Lyonesse* trilogy) lumped all the Avalons together – he conceived the Elder Islands (Hybras, or Hy Brasil), on which there are kingdoms (including Lyonesse) and cities – including Ys and Avallon. Ys, of course, in the final instalment of the series (*Madouc*), classically sinks into the depths of the sea.

And what happened next?

To bridge the gap between the legend of King Arthur and later historical periods, one can draw on both the chronicles mentioned at the outset and *fantasy* literature.

As can be roughly calculated, Arthur's reign lasted around twenty-five years. At the time of his death on the fields of Camlann, the king was probably just over forty.

The chaos that ensued after the Battle of Camlann (AD 537? 540? 542?) probably lasted longer than the turmoil following the deaths of Ambrosius or Uther Pendragon. Whether Arthur had any descendants apart from Mordred, we do not know – and it does not really matter. Let us remember that we are dealing with Celts, to whom the concept of a feudal lord or

hereditary monarchy. The throne was not automatically due to the sons or relatives of a fallen king, and there was no 'The King is dead, long live the King!' The King of the Celts had to (or should have) had the democratic approval of the majority – and after Arthur, it was certainly no easy task to secure such approval. But there were certainly many candidates. Legend has it that in the end, Constantine, son of Cador (Custennin ap Cador in Welsh), became *the* new *Dux Bellorum*. In the version recounted by the parish priest Layamon, Arthur himself, on his deathbed, handed over the office to Constantine.

And what does *fantasy* literature have to say on the matter? In **The Beloved Exile**, Parke Godwin also makes Constantine Arthur's successor, though not without a fierce struggle. Among the rivals and pretenders to the crown are: Emrys, son of Kai; King Mark of Cornwall; and… Queen Guinevere.

However, if we are to go by the chronicle by the learned monk Gildas, entitled **On the Ruin and Conquest of Britain**, then after Camlann (and Arthur's death) Britain broke up into five kingdoms. These were: Gwynedd, Powys, Dyfed and Gwent (present-day Wales) and Dumnonia (present-day Cornwall, Devon and Somerset). These kingdoms were ruled by 'tyrants', described by Gildas in contemptuous and unflattering terms – the reigns of these wicked and inept rulers led to the country's downfall, as the title suggests. The chronicler names three of these 'tyrants' by name: they were Maelgwyn, ruler of Gwynedd; Vortipor, ruler of Dyfed; and Constantine, king of Dumnonia. Gildas seems to dislike the latter in particular – he calls him 'the filthy whelp of a lecherous Dumnonian lioness'.

According to Gildas, the Celtic kingdoms of Clyde, Rheged and Elmet survived in the north of the Island.

Gildas's 'tyrants' are contrasted by another chronicler, the Venerable Bede, with the wise and just Saxon kings, known as bretwalds – Aelle of Sussex, Cerdic, Cynric and Caewlin of Wessex, Aethelbert of Kent, and Raedwald of East Anglia. No wonder, then, that the tyrants began to fall like puppets, whilst the just and wise bretwolds gradually took control of their domains. Through a rapid expansion, the Saxons took control of the land of the Britons. As early as

in the year 550, shortly after the Battle of Camlann, the Saxon invaders had occupied the present-day territories of the counties of Hampshire and Wiltshire – thus bringing places so closely associated with Arthur, such as Winchester, Salisbury and Stonehenge, under their control. By defeating the Britons at Beranburh (556) and at Dyrham (577), the Saxons penetrated deep into the Salisbury Plain and into Somerset. They captured further Arthurian strongholds: Gloucester, Cirencester, Bath, Glastonbury... and Camelot. They soon gained control of the mouth of the River Severn where it flows into the Bristol Channel (present-day Gloucestershire), cutting Dumnonia off from the Celts in Wales. When Devon fell, Dumnonia practically ceased to exist – it shrank to the size of Cornwall.

Marching northwards, the Saxons, led by Edwin, conquered the British principalities of Elmet, Deira and Bernicia, establishing in their place the Saxon kingdom of Northumbria. Thus, by the year 600 – that is, half a century after Arthur's death – virtually the whole of Britain, from Kent to Edinburgh, from Sussex to Devon, to the Bristol Channel, to the mouths of the Severn and Dee rivers, belonged to the Saxons. The Britons remained only in Wales, Cornwall and northern Rheged. Their numbers are dwindling – a great exodus is underway – with many returning to the continent from whence they came. They sail to a land that remains Celtic – to Lesser Britain, or Armorica, today's Brittany.

The victorious Saxons formed the so-called Heptarchy, comprising seven kingdoms: Kent, Essex, Sussex, Wessex, East Anglia, Mercia and Northumbria. Soon, the entire Heptarchy began to wage war against one another. Between 617 and 633, Northumbria, ruled by Edwin (later canonised as a saint), gained dominance. Soon, however, Mercia (Tolkien's homeland, later referred to as the Marches in his books) routed Northumbria and established its hegemony. An interesting fact: in his battles against his fellow Saxons, Penda, King of Mercia, was supported by Cadwallo, the Celtic King of Gwynedd. Perhaps this was because the Northumbrians were already Christians, whilst Mercia and the Celts, though they worshipped different gods, stood in solidarity against the new, expansionist religion?

But the Anglo-Saxon alliance between Mercia and Gwynedd did not last long. Soon (c. 790), the next King of Mercia...

separated himself from the Celts, who had been driven westwards, by a great earthen rampart, which, named after him, is called *Offa's Dyke (stretching* from the mouth of the River Wye to the Bay of Bristol in the south to the mouth of the River Dee in the north). From that moment on, Offa's Dyke serves as a border, a dividing line between two cultures, two languages… and two legends. For at that time in Wales, the chronicler Nennius is already writing about Arthur, the saviour of Britain and the vanquisher of the Saxons… And the Saxons, though victorious, may still be recalling the rout at Badon…

The Saxons, meanwhile, have their own problems. Mercia is conquered by Wessex. Egbert, the ruler of Wessex who now holds hegemony, unites the Heptarchy into a single state in 827 and becomes the first historically recognised and confirmed king of what can now be called England in the modern sense of the word. Egbert resided in Winchester, already regarded at that time as the seat of the legendary Arthur.

In 838, Cornwall, the last stronghold of the Dumno Britons*, was finally conquered. Tintagel Castle, the birthplace of the great King Arthur and the cradle of his legend, fell into the hands of Hengist's descendants...

Victorious England also faced problems – another invader arrived: the Danes. For a time, the Vikings held complete sway over the country. Poor, constantly ravaged island… Alfred the Great finally drove out the Danes… But that was not the end of the invasions.

The year 1066 arrives, and William, Duke of Normandy, crosses the Channel. 'The Bastard', as he is called, routs the Anglo-Saxons of King Harold II** at Hastings.

* The name Cornwall, contrary to the beautiful legend of Coryneus, Brutus's comrade, dates back to this very period. It was only in the 9th century that the conquerors, the Saxons, bestowed this name upon the peninsula.

* * An interesting fact for those who enjoy such trivia: King Harold was killed at Hastings when an arrow struck him in the eye. According to legend, his wife, Queen Edith 'Swan-neck', recognised his body on the battlefield – stripped of its armour – by the so-called 'malinkas' – the bruises she had bitten into her husband's shoulder in a frenzy of passion during their night of love on the eve of the battle.

Britain during the Heptarchy (c. 800)

William is given the epithet ‘the Conqueror’; England is Norman. England will soon begin to speak a mixture of Saxon and French; from this cocktail, the English language will be born – the language in which the parish priest Layamon writes about King Arthur... The parish priest writes, whilst the Norman feudal lords are already setting their sights on Wales. On the weak, feuding principalities of Powys, Dyfed, Gwynedd, Deheubarth, Morgannwg, Gwent... The Norman expansion begins – as described by Jadwiga Żylińska in her novella **Pilgrimage to Compostela**.

But the Welsh Celts do not give in. They unite and fight. When, in 1157, Henry II Plantagenet attempts to annex Wales and turn it into a vassal state, the princes Owain Gwynedd and Rhys ap Gruffyd deal him a crushing defeat and secure Wales’s independence for a long time to come. During the reigns of Henry II’s successors – Richard the Lionheart, John Lackland and Henry III – England was weak, embroiled in wars and civil strife, and had neither the time nor the resources for conquest. Wales’s independence was not under threat. What is more, this independence was formally recognised by England! When, in 1267, under the Treaty of Montgomery, Prince Llewelyn ap Iorweth, known as the Great, united the Welsh principalities into a single large Principality of Wales, England recognised it as an independent state. This was the only such instance in history. But it did not last long.

For in 1272, Edward I, a wise and energetic king, ascended the English throne. One of his first initiatives, after restoring order to the realm and consolidating royal authority, was the conquest and subjugation of Wales. The fighting was fierce, but the Welsh stood no chance against Edward. The English overran the country. In 1282, the last independent Welsh prince, Llywelyn ap Gruffydd, rallied his people to revolt. He suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of Builth Wells on the River Irfon, in which he himself was killed. Following the pacification (read: massacre) of the country, Wales recognised English hegemony and vassalage to the English crown. Legend has it that, though defeated, the descendants of King Arthur laid down conditions to Edward I. ‘We will not accept a ruler,’ they cried, ‘who was born outside Wales and who speaks French!’ ‘Agreed,’ said Edward, whereupon he…

He unwrapped his son, who had been born during the campaign, from his swaddling clothes. ‘Behold your lord. He was born in Carnarvon, in Wales, and does not speak a word of French!’ Since then, every heir to the British throne has borne the title of Prince of Wales*.

And what does history tell us? As a token of vassalage and allegiance, Edward I receives from the defeated Welsh… the crown of King Arthur. The crown of the legendary ruler returns to Londinium. To the city where Uther Pendragon and Arthur were crowned… So what if the crown is a forgery? It’s the symbol that counts.

And what of our brave, invincible Picts from the North? They held out even longer, albeit in a slightly different form. First… they repeated Vortigern’s mistake. Under pressure from the Saxons in the south, they sought help from the Celts: *the* Irish *Scoti* from Dal Riada. The Scots, in turn, quickly took control of the country, which from then on (the year 844) took the name Scotland. The Scottish and Pictish peoples soon merged into a single nation.

The very same Edward I who had subjugated Wales set about Scotland with a vengeance. He conquered the Scots in 1296, but as early as 1297 the valiant William Wallace dealt the English a crushing defeat at Stirling and liberated the country. Edward, in turn, routed the Scots at Falkirk and occupied the country. But the descendants of the Picts did not lay down their arms. The valiant Robert Bruce rose to the challenge. When, in 1314, Edward I’s son, Edward II – the aforementioned Prince of Wales from infancy – attempted (ineptly) to continue his famous father’s work and pacify the Scots, he was soundly thrashed by Bruce at Bannockburn, in a defeat the English had not witnessed since the Battle of Hastings. Scotland regained its independence and autonomy, whilst the English waited a long time for revenge for Bannockburn. They got their revenge, but not until almost five centuries later: in 1746, when they massacred the Scots at Culloden and brought the Highlands completely under their control, forbidding the Highlanders not only to—

* This is a legend from start to finish. In reality, the title of Prince of Wales was established (purely formally) as the title of the eldest son of the King of England only in 1301. The first Prince of Wales was in fact Edward, son of Edward I, the later foolish and inept Edward II. The very same man who had a red-hot iron rod driven up his arse.

not only weapons, but even kilts and tartans. Yet the indomitable Pictish-Scottish spirit has endured: Scotland has retained its distinct identity. To this day. Just as in the days of Robert Bruce, England's reach extends only as far as the River Tweed. Beyond the River Tweed lies Scotland; a fool is he who cannot see this.

And Edward III, son of Edward II—who was defeated at Bannockburn, deposed and brutally murdered—took a solemn oath at Westminster in 1344: 'I shall faithfully follow in the footsteps of the great King Arthur and form a company of the Round Table from my good and righteous knights...' Edward, a Norman through and through, takes this oath in French. He knows no English at all. Not a single word. As for Welsh – the language of Arthur – he has not the faintest idea.

In 1348, following victories at Crécy and Calais, Edward already has his Round Table – seated around it are the first 'most worthy among the worthy' – the Knights of the Garter…

But in the meantime, the Welsh rise up once more to fight against the English invaders. In 1400, Owain Glyndwr – known to the English as Owen Glendower – leads a rebellion. A guerrilla war begins. Under the slogan: 'A free Wales for free Welshmen!', Owain Glyndwr ravages English settlements and attacks Norman castles, which had been a symbol of foreign occupation since the time of Edward I. Under heavy pressure from the English army, Glyndwr called on his Celtic brethren in Ireland and Scotland for help, and even asked for French intervention. But no help came. Owen was supported only by the rebellious English families of the Mortimers and the Percys, the latter including the famous Percy 'Hotspur'. In 1403, the rebels suffered a crushing defeat at Shrewsbury, and in 1410 the uprising was finally quelled. This marked the end of dreams of an autonomous and independent state. Wales definitively became part of England – later Great Britain*.

* Owain Glyndwr himself, the leader of the uprising, escaped the English reprisals and went into hiding at his daughters' estate, lost amongst the moors, where he died around 1416. Folk tradition attributed magical powers to him and linked him to the legend of Arthur

The slogan 'An independent Wales for the Welsh' is, however, occasionally chanted. Although Wales is not Ulster and there has never been a Welsh IRA, it did happen (in 1966) that, in addition to the slogan, a few bombs were also thrown. And the iconic heroes of twentieth-century Welsh nationalists and separatists were Llewelyn the Great and Owain Glyndwr...

And in the 20th century, the Red Dragon – the emblem of Uther Pendragon and Arthur – became the emblem of Wales...

However, without speculating on what the future of Wales might hold, let us return to the past. To history.

In 1415, King Henry V revived the traditions of the Great King Arthur through the triumph of English arms at Agincourt and, under the Treaty of Troyes, married Catherine de Valois, a French princess.

And that French princess, now the widowed Queen Catherine, remarries in 1422 – secretly marrying a certain nobleman. This nobleman is neither Saxon nor Norman – his family tree traces back neither to the Saxon thanes of the Heptarchy nor to the knights of William the Conqueror. He is a Welshman, a Briton, a Celt through and through, from generation upon generation. He comes from the ancient House of Tudor, which, according to family legend, traces its roots back to King Arthur himself. The nobleman bears the same name as the Welsh heroes of the struggle for independence, Gwynedd and Glyndwr. The name of one of Arthur's knights: Owain.

In 1485, Sir Thomas Malory, a valiant knight from Newbold Revell in the county of Warwickshire, published his life's work, entitled **The Death of Arthur**...

In the same year, Henry Richmond, grandson of the Welshman Owain Tudor and the dowager queen Catherine, ascended the throne and assumed power over England. He considered himself a direct descendant of King Arthur and officially proclaimed himself Arthur's heir. He took up arms against Richard III of the

and Merlin. According to numerous legends, Owain, like Arthur or Merlin, did not die at all, but lies hidden in the underground caverns of the Snowdonia mountains, awaiting the day of great need, when he will return to fight once more for a free Wales.

Henry of York stands beneath a banner on which – just as on Arthur's standard at Badon – the Red Dragon is embroidered. And just as Arthur did at Badon, the Welshman Richmond triumphs at Bosworth, in a battle in which Richard III, having lost his grey horse, known as White Surrey, offers 'the kingdom for a horse'. The victory at Bosworth and Richard's death bring the War of the Roses to an end.

Ascending the English throne as Henry VII, the descendant of Owain Tudor proclaims the restoration of British rule over Britain and a return to the Arthurian tradition. He christens his first-born son Arthur*, and the ceremonial christening takes place in Winchester – that is, in Malory's Camelot.

Arthur Tudor (who was to have been Arthur II), however, dies young and never ascends the throne. The prophecy of 'Arthur's return' does not come to pass...

But the Welsh Tudors, descendants of the legendary king, remain in power. Henry VIII, the second son of Henry VII, King of England, orders the Round Table from Winchester to be restored and repainted, adorning it with the red and white Tudor Rose. Henry VIII leaves behind three children. He is succeeded first by his son, Edward VI, and then by his daughter, known as Mary the Bloody**. And after Mary, in 1558, Elizabeth, the daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, ascends the English throne. Elizabeth I, the great Queen of England. Poets, captivated by her, will write that, and I quote: 'her gaze betrays that she traces her lineage to the true Britons'. And they would add: 'Glory to the rightful monarchs, the true children of Britain!'

Arthur's lineage and legacy are reborn… in a woman. A woman who, like Arthur, will make Britain a great power.

* This male name, popular throughout the world, is of Celtic origin and derives from the legendary king; it has no other source. Everyone bearing this name does so in honour of the immortal glory of the great King of the Britons. This is yet another – and by no means insignificant – contribution of the Arthurian legend to our modern world.

** Not counting Lady Jane Grey's nine-day reign, of course.

A woman who would die childless.

In 1859, Alfred Lord Tennyson finished writing **Idylls of the King*...*

In 1958, Terence Hanbury White finished writing **A Candle in the Wind**, the final volume *of the *Once and Future King** trilogy...

In 1982, John Boorman completed the film **Excalibur*...*

In the same year, Marion Zimmer Bradley finished writing *The *Mists of* Avalon*...

In 1991, Terry Gilliam directed the film **The Fisher King*... Arthurus, Rex quondam, Rexque futurus.*

The legend lives on. The Grail is still to be found. Avalon still exists.

But it remains shrouded in mist.